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# Comfort and Strength

From

# The Shepherd Psalm

A Devotional Study of the Twenty-third Psalm

BY  
CHRISTIAN F. REISNER



THE METHODIST BOOK CONCERN  
NEW YORK CINCINNATI

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CHRISTIAN F. REISNER



TO HER,  
WHOSE PERENNIAL GENTLENESS,  
UNFAILING AFFECTION,  
AND LOYAL CONFIDENCE  
HAVE REFRESHED AND INSPIRED  
THROUGH THE BUSY YEARS,  
MY WIFE,  
THIS BOOK IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED.



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## A FRIEND'S FOREWORD

THE twenty-third psalm is the gem of the Psalter. It stands unrivaled as an expression of simple faith and confidence. Wherever the Hebrew and Christian faiths have been instilled into the hearts of men, their immortal words find lodgment in the memory and spring unbidden to the lips. It is the universal confession of the devout and believing soul.

So simple is the psalm that it hardly needs a commentary. Yet there are in it phrases and allusions that have been illuminated by the researches of scholars and the observations of travelers. This interpretative material is found in the present volume. The author has read the best literature on the subject and has put to good use the fruits of his reading.

But it is not an interpretation that the author has given us so much as a book of devotion. He has translated the moods and

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sentiments of the ancient psalmist into the living speech and thought of to-day. Indeed, he has done more. He has made the lessons of the psalm his own, has assimilated them into his own being, and then poured them out with a warmth of feeling, a characteristic uniqueness of style, and an atmosphere of unaffected piety that bears the soul of the reader Godward and keeps his mind stayed on him.

It has been my privilege to know the author intimately for twenty-five years. His multitudinous activities, his tireless energy, his resourcefulness of method, and the whole-hearted objectivity of his ministry would hardly suggest to the observer that he was a mystic, yet such he is. He has a singularly clear vision of God, a directness of approach to the throne of grace, a simplicity of faith, a vivid consciousness of the Divine Presence and redeeming power such as we are not accustomed to associate with so active a life. This book is a transcript of his own inner experience. It is a message from the heart to the heart. Throughout it there runs

## FROM THE SHEPHERD PSALM

the note of reality. It is this characteristic of the author that in large measure accounts for the fruitfulness of his ministry and for the effectiveness with which his devotional writings appeal to the common heart and conscience.

ALBERT C. KNUDSON,  
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## THE AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

IF comfort and strength be supplied, we will be completely furnished. Discouragement wrecks ambition, and sorrow saps away vital strength. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people" was not a vain command. There is a balm in Gilead for every wound. Paul walked pathways of danger and battle and knew when he said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Our gospel is for earth day needs; we do not wait for a future heaven in which to enjoy the benefits. Jesus as the Good Shepherd lived as the Son of man among men. He actually felt all our human experiences. And so he understands.

This psalm ties the Old and New Testaments together. We here find promises possible only to the heart of the Good Shepherd who giveth his life for the sheep. No need is missed. It is so full and simple that comments seem unnecessary. But others have

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ventured, though no one has sent out a new book in ten years. The first manuscript for "Comfort and Strength from the Shepherd Psalm" was prepared more than ten years ago. But courage to offer it for publication did not come until a scholarly friend suggested that it would bring spiritual aid to folks, if printed.

Then the author started to study and revise, working through hours snatched from sleep and amid numberless interruptions. A busy city pastorate leaves little leisure if one half the regular duties are performed. But excuses will not enhance the book. It is far from ideal, but here it is with an earnest prayer that it may indeed bring Comfort and Strength. Twenty-two years in city pastorates, where thousands have tested the promises and hundreds have been converted and found food to sustain so that the way could be traveled, convince the writer that as never before the world is hungry for God. "His grace is sufficient" and "His yoke is easy" and "His paths are paths of pleasantness" and "His spirit does guide into all

## FROM THE SHEPHERD PSALM

truth” and “His love faileth never.” The author will be fully repaid if here some of the weary find rest, the hungry be fed, the sad receive solace, the bewildered see the “Way,” the lonely find friends, and all of us at last come home to the Father’s House.



**T**he Lord is my shepherd; I shall  
not want. \* \* \*

**H**e maketh me to lie down in green  
pastures: he leadeth me beside the  
still waters. \* \* \*

**H**e restoreth my soul: he leadeth  
me in the paths of righteousness for  
his name's sake. \* \* \*

**Y**ea, though I walk through the  
valley of the shadow of death, I will  
fear no evil: for thou art with me;  
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

**T**hou preparest a table before me in  
the presence of mine enemies: thou  
anointest my head with oil; my cup  
runneth over. \* \* \*

**S**urely goodness and mercy shall  
follow me all the days of my life: and  
I will dwell in the house of the Lord  
for ever. \* \* \*



## CHAPTER I

### THE SOURCE OF A BELIEVER'S SUPPLIES

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want”

IN Florence, Italy, stands an old building which six hundred years ago was a palace. It is now used as a museum. For a long while it was a jail for common criminals. It was whitewashed again and again in the effort to keep its dark rooms bright and clean. There was a rumor that some place in this building was a portrait of Dante by the master artist Giotto—the only one painted during the poet's life. Finally, after much search and picking at the walls, three men devoted to art discovered some signs of coloring on the walls of a particular room. They set to work and finally uncovered the wonderful portrait. This incident, none the less interesting because of its age, lends itself with peculiar fitness to a scriptural application. Even as those old walls had become

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covered with dust, dirt, and other accumulations of the years, thus obliterating the work of the Florentine painter, so in the Book, often neglected and long covered over with artificial theories, there is a wonderful picture of God. All the words known to man have been used to delineate the portrait. We may discover it for ourselves and be enraptured and lifted by the vision. We may behold the King in his beauty. He is indeed the "fairest among ten thousand." But he is more. He comes closer. He is our Saviour, our Friend, our Leader, the Good Shepherd.

The names assigned to God are employed to awaken our love, to arouse our imagination so that it will create pictures of God that will sustain and assure. An old story floats down through the ages about the great warrior, Hannibal. He had donned his heavy armor and just before going out to lead his troops into battle went to kiss his wife and little lad farewell. The child, who worshiped the father, ran away in fright. The father was grieved deeply and could not understand



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until the astute mother suggested that he remove his armor. Then the son saw the real father and ran again to his arms and heart. How true this is concerning God! Some descriptions frighten folk away. But we may see "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4. 6).

*The Bible is steadily trying to give us practical and heart-easing visions of God.* The Old Testament is full of names. They go from the tender one "Father" to the exalted one "Jahweh." The "shepherd" was a warm term that brought God near and made him dear to Israel; it behooves us to find as vivid and moving a name for ourselves. God has always reached after the affections of man. Jesus came primarily to touch the love-life.

The Christian religion is the simplest one known. It is not an involved and complicated system. A plain man need not err therein. Direct access to God is possible. A far-reaching ritual is unnecessary. Priests and cloisters often hinder and be-

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wilder us. God is so near that he hears and understands. Christ's gospel is for every-day use. That which asserts itself to be valuable only on Sunday is a spurious kind.

Hard-headed, sensible men want a spiritual help that reaches into the shops, stores, and streets. That kind will attract and will command followers. Theological phrases that mean nothing to the untutored act as sand in the eyes of the groping. An understandable term that brings news from God is as a lighted house to the traveler lost in a blizzard. The shepherds understood the angels' message; it came to them in their time and tongue. The multitude grasped Peter's preaching at Pentecost; he was so normal in his humanity that he used the speech of the masses. Paul struck straight to the heart of Festus; "Almost thou persuadest me," was the cry of the ruler. Moody turned Bible stories into up-to-date language and settings, until one could see the characters in our town and street.

The Bible is a clearly written book; it is God's word revealed so that the wayfaring

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man can understand. The symbolizing habit of some interpreters is unfair and even untrue. We dare not start with a coveted doctrine and then quote twisted scripture to prove it; we must mine its truth as gold from the hills. We must put ourselves in the time and place of the Book's people if we read aright. Its whole purpose is to give us a message from God. Every style of composition is employed to accomplish this purpose. Story, history, parable, poetry, exhortation, and sermon form are employed. That must be remembered; parable and poetry must not be taken in a bald, literal way.

*God is at hand and not far off.* He tentanted a body like ours with all its limitations. We are in his image. He is moved by our need. He remembers our frame that we are "but dust." He can understand our heart hungers. He was lonely and genuinely sorrowed. The seeking always find solace. He wants us to enjoy his care and love. For this reason Jesus came, toiled, taught, and died. He bids us come freely and frequently for all needs. He endeavors to make us feel at

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home in his presence. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." We are no longer strangers but fellow citizens with the saints.

We simply say "Our Father" and retain childlike trust. We do not struggle to follow commandments and rules. We love, and work out our love, and that fulfills the law. We follow the footsteps of our Leader. His footmarks are on all life's roads. He knows where we can walk and our strength. He leads us on to better things. He is the Good Shepherd that "giveth his life for the sheep." When our hearts are tossed by stormy fear we quiet them by saying, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want."

Jacob was the first Old Testament character to describe Jehovah as a shepherd in his care of man. Saint Augustine taught this twenty-third psalm to martyrs so that they could repeat it in the midst of their sufferings. In other days, when Roman Catholics persecuted those they counted heretics, two who were being burned at the stake were accosted by a bishop who said, "You would

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never hear prayers read, and now you must listen." But they did not "listen." Instead they chanted together the twenty-third psalm and so drowned the voice of the bishop. A business man, hard driven and perplexed by many dogmatic creeds that were insistent for attention twenty-five years ago, declined them all and took the twenty-third psalm as his creed and held strongly to it and grew into sweet strength with it as a foundation.

The Shepherd Psalm ranks second only to John 14 as the most-used selection in the Book. All cults sing it. The Christian Scientists employ it almost as much as they do the Lord's Prayer. The hard toiler tangled in problems or terrified by possible to-morrows frees his spirit through its contemplation. The young watch for the sure Leader and the aged look for the supporting arm of a Friend as they repeat it. Its air is victorious. It fits easily to music. It is so pure a diamond that it never wears out nor loses its heart-stored light.

Late critics agree with Adam Clarke, the

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*only commentator of early days who denied its Davidic authorship.* Briggs and Cheyne tell us that it is a nation's song, as does Clarke. MacLaren, a later writer, insists that it is the flower of an individual experience. Delitzsch, Perowne, Henry, Whedon, and Plummer hold that it was the work of David. Some place it near the beginning of his career, others at the close. It is foolish to deny the conclusions of best scholarship, even though we would like to do so.

The psalm undoubtedly has the air, the stateliness, the sincerity, the heart ring that David would have given to such a composition, and Plummer, after considering Clarke's denial of its Davidic authorship, concludes: "The general impression is doubtless correct, that the psalm was written by David. The habits of his life would furnish all the imagery of the first part of the psalm. David was eminently fitted to write a devout pastoral." Even though unable to say that, yet with MacLaren we may say: "No doubt Jehovah is the Shepherd of Israel in several Asaphite psalms

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and in Jeremiah; but notwithstanding great authorities, I cannot persuade myself that the voice which comes so straight to the heart did not come from the heart of a brother speaking across the centuries his own personal emotions, which are universal just because they are individual. It is the pure utterance of personal trust in Jehovah, darkened by no fears or complaints and so perfectly at rest that it has nothing more to ask." Some one with an experience like David's wrote it; and if, then, it is employed to express Israel's experience, he dedicated it to that purpose. Without too technical study let us endeavor to find the spiritual gold and put *that* into circulation.

Every word is rich. No unnecessary language is employed. Meditation is difficult in this busy day, yet we may well employ it here. "My Shepherd" gives meaning to the whole psalm. Briggs and Cheyne, with several others, insist that the figure changes later on. Briggs cuts it into three sections. The "Shepherd" prevails up to verse 3b, where a Guide for the people comes in, and at verse 5

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a Host banquets his guests. Briggs says that the poetry in the first section is a "trimeter," the second a "tetrameter," the third a "pentameter." "This is an advance toward a climax of joyous faith in Yahweh."

"The Song of the Syrian Guest" shows how easy it is to carry the figure of the shepherd through the whole psalm. Cheyne, the extreme critic, seems at least partially to agree with the Syrian author when, in commenting on verse five, he says, "We are now at one of the resting places of the flock."

*"Yahweh" is Israel's great word for "God."* It is used here. It was too high and terrible to speak often. The false "awfulness" grew out of a wrong conception of the declaration of Moses that "No man can see God and live." An old tradition tells of a Roman test demanded by an emperor to prove the preeminence of either the Jew or the Christian. The Jewish rabbi breathed the name "Yahweh" into an ox's ear and it dropped dead. A priest spoke Christ's name and the ox came to life again.

Israel never questioned the might of Je-



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hovah or Yahweh. Even when polytheistic tendencies were preeminent His powers were unquestioned. So it is clear that the omnipotent, unchanging, all-knowing God is in mind.

We need a little revival of Calvin's emphasis on the absolute God. We have by profanity and egotism become too cheaply familiar with the name of God. Our high conception has shrunk. Man is too independent. God has been fenced up and limited. We must remember that he is still Ruler of the universe. "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." Do we believe it?

He inhabiteth eternity. His will is supreme. Man cannot defeat him in the end. Our God is checked by nothing but his loving, yet just nature. He can dispense what he will. His resources have no bounds. Limitations are unknown. Therefore our petition will not be turned away because of poverty or inattention. He is great in power, great in vision, great in love, great in knowledge. He is never helpless nor ex-

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hausted. He is sure to aid us when we need. This is the great, all-inclusive God who is called "My Shepherd." His greatness includes the ability to note the fall of the sparrow as certainly as to speak worlds into existence. His power expresses itself in loving care for man's many needs as surely as in arranging all the mechanism of the universe.

*"The Lord is my shepherd" has many illuminating translations.* Plummer names a number. The Chaldee: "The Lord fed his people in the wilderness." The Septuagint, Syriac, Arabic: "The Lord feeds me." Vulgate and Douai: "The Lord ruleth me." Adam Clarke quotes the Scotch: "The Lord governs me." The best word is "Shepherd" and properly comprehended brings soothing reassurance.

We Americans cannot understand its measureless meaning. It was a vivid term to this people who roamed about as did the early American Indians seeking provender. They had no fences and farms. They understood how the shepherd found pastures and

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springs and led along dangerous pathways and guarded against destructive beasts. We as mortals have here "no continuing city." We cannot put up a tent or tabernacle on our mount of transfiguration and rest in ease; we too must go down into the valley of doubt and trial. The ways are dangerous, the pasture often sparse, and the beasts numerous. As we journey the Shepherd must care for us, then all things will work together for our good.

*What does the shepherd do?*

He is experienced. He knows the sheep. He recognizes their needs, how and when to supply them. He is posted concerning the best pastures. He understands the threatening dangers. He feels keenly the responsibilities upon him. He will do his best to meet them. This is surely true when applied to Christ, my Shepherd. It ought to be equally true of under shepherds. Pity the pastor who does his work listlessly or carelessly; Jesus's test of love was "Feed my sheep." The Master will call to account the Sunday school teacher or church worker of

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any sort who does not do his utmost to care for the sheep.

*He is a caretaker.* We may so translate the word. "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known unto God." Wesley said, "I dare no more worry and fret than I dare curse and swear." How few realize this! All sorts of things make us anxious. We carry burdens never meant for our backs. We load ourselves with responsibilities that God will gladly bear. If we have done our best, it is time to rest. Friction with folks and tasks keeps our hearts and minds blistered. We need the evenness of poise and the patience of trust. All straining, wearing, cankering care he will lift from us if we trust and obey. Let the Shepherd brush away wrinkles which prove the presence of weighty care.

*He knows better what His sheep need than we do ourselves.* He knows where the food is found. Men once thought tomatoes

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to be poison. Necessity drove to their use, and they were found to be good food. Our prejudices which shut us out of blessings sometimes must be similarly broken down. We cannot live by bread alone. Some men work so many hours that it is almost impossible for them to get to church. Others discount worship periods by finding time for pleasure when they can find none for church attendance. Our busy life threatens to drive out family, and even private, prayer. Suburbs make early trains necessary and various modern conditions break family activities into scattered hours that spoil common gatherings.

We have little opportunity to go apart in the mountain to pray; our brain rooms are so full that there are seldom any "closets" into which we can withdraw. We live amidst noisy diversions that wreck plans for moments of meditation. But consecrated devotion to the Shepherd will lead to a way. He will open a closet door some place where we can withdraw to pray. It may be found at early dawn or late at night.

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It may be shut in some deep basement or in the top story. It may be provided by a stiffened will that can ignore all diverting surroundings. It may come from the help of such manna-filled devotional books as "Yet Another Day," and "Times of Retirement," and "By the Still Waters." It may come from a summer school or a winter revival meeting. It may be furnished by the visit of a friend or joyously caught from an unexpected source.

If any pasturage exists, the Shepherd will know where to find it. No soul need starve. Only foolish excuses can keep us from the prepared feast. It will appeal to the dull or keen appetite. It will be within the reach of all degrees of culture and peculiarities of disposition. There will be no excuse for turning to the husks of the world except pure willfulness. And only the Shepherd can supply the nourishing foods.

Our materialistic evolutionists must learn that food sufficient for animals cannot sustain man. He is different. For example, while the bone or tissue of one human can

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be grafted by a surgeon on the bone or tissue of another human, the bone or tissue of any other animal without exception fails to knit to a human bone or tissue. Man must have the peculiar pasture the Shepherd supplies.

We will be spiritually as well as physically fed. The good will be clearly marked out for us. It is difficult to choose the right. We make mistakes so easily. It is hard to infallibly tell the genuine. But his Spirit is to guide us into all truth.

*We will be guarded against poisonous food.* The drunkard starts with the social wineglass. The gambler begins by risking a paltry sum. Frivolity and careless moral standards open the gate to the downward road that brings womanhood to the outcast world. He will preserve the danger signal in the red blush of shame. We must have moral meat that does not disease appetite, break down vital fibers, nor blur vision. Alcohol opiates the moral nature as its very first effect; that is why the white-slave procurer operates around liquor-serving dance halls and encourages the wine table.

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*The Shepherd is faithful.* Thompson in *The Land and the Book* tells us that frequently the shepherd, even now, dies in defense of his sheep. The hills are filled with wolves and panthers. Human robbers often kill and carry the sheep away. He describes one shepherd who died under the hackings of the khanjars of three Bedouin robbers in the midst of his sheep where he stood fighting. David's first prowess was exhibited when he killed a marauding lion and bear who would tear his sheep. The shepherds come to love the sheep as their own lives. Even now only hardened butchers can be secured to slay lambs to provide the meat market's demands. Sheep are very trustful and affectionate.

The promise is, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." "Lo, I am with you always." "Fear not, I will help thee." "This is the way, walk ye in it." "Fear not, little flock; for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

All the land was open. No shepherd had an exclusive right to pasture sections. It de-



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pended upon his wisdom and foresight. So it is in life. Some men gather only strength for the flesh because they follow a carnal leader. Others grow smooth and puffed with pride, but collapse in the storms of temptation and trial. But a few are hardy and sturdy and thrive in all weathers because evenly nurtured as God's sons and daughters. He shows us how to find the pasturage that will fit us to realize the promise, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."

*The promise "shall not want" is confidently affirmed.* Briggs reminds us that in the original this is the imperfect tense, and so is not a future, "but a present of habitual experience." He translates it, "I have no want." The Shepherd has provided for all wants. Time does not begin or end the supply. The sources are exhaustless. His patience cannot be broken, for he is a Shepherd. Hence we are supplied. Plummer gives the paraphrase of the Chaldee: "They lacked nothing." Syriac and Arabic: "He will not suffer me to want anything." Luther says: "I shall assuredly want

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nothing. I shall eat and drink, and have abundance of clothes, food, protection, peace, and necessities of every kind, which contribute to the support of life."

The very first meaning is a natural one. God looks after our temporal needs. Another psalm writer says: "Once I have been young, and now I am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." That is actually true in everyday experience. Jesus literally fed the hungry multitude who had remained to hear him preach. He borrowed a lad's lunch and multiplied it. The good Samaritan paid for the future keep of the wounded man at the hotel. He did not stop by bringing him there on his beast to be unloaded on others or to shift for himself before being able to do so.

*"No good thing will be withheld from them that walk uprightly."* If we "seek first" the Kingdom, all other things will be added. Godliness is profitable in the best sense. It is exactly true that food and raiment, and even needed health, will be measured out by the Shepherd. John prayed

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“that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (3 John 2). He can lead us to find work when idle. He can give wisdom in business. He will direct in the government of a home and a nation. Spirituality is closely related to physical conditions. God who clothes the lily will provide for us. His obedient sheep will never suffer from hunger. If bread-bringing ravens are necessary, they will be sent.

We will not lack strength for our work. Food gives the physical. The spiritual will also come. We will hear a voice of sweetening peace giving courage after the storm. Despair cannot then wreck ambition nor a winning persistency. The pillar of fire will appear in the night-befogging gloom. The Master's hand will catch us when the sucking waves try to drag us down. We will have patience and power enough to do our work and gather fruit in joyfulness. We shall be satisfied. It will be literal and natural, not mystical and airy. We will have food and raiment, thought life, and worthy tasks.

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*We are to aid in providing supplies.* Wolves in sheep's clothing get a living out of the church; they add nothing to it. Church tramps soon lose the spirit of disciples. They want fine sermons, good music, and courteous treatment. They reverse Jesus's life motto. They come to be served—not to serve. It is not to be wondered at that soon they backslide, or, worse still, become carping and critical Pharisees. We are healthy only when we aid the Shepherd in furnishing food to folk.

Some yeasty desires may be unsatisfied. The Shepherd is feeding us for growth and usefulness; many imagined needs go unsupplied. Children cry for cakes when they need food. He is a Father and wants his sons to grow up worthy of Him. Suffering sweetens hearts as frost does some fruits. Storms fiber the moral life as winds do Maine-coast oaks. Disappointment in material things whets the appetite for spiritual things as frosty winds do the stomach hunger. We will have "every good cross, every good comfort, every needed chastisement,

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every needed supply, all timely lessons, all good deliverances.”

We are not to be raised up invalids, but good soldiers. We are to have our best brought out by carrying crosses, otherwise we could not worthily show His likeness. We are to prove ourselves rulers over self, not pampered babies of favoritism. We are to endure, not be banished in a day like Jonah's gourd. The schooling, the discipline, the sifting will all come. But we will come off more than conquerors. His grace is sufficient. We can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us.

The Christian Scientist almost without exception takes up this ill-founded “ism” when in a backslidden state where he cannot distinguish the voice of the true and false. No soul in vital and intimate fellowship has yet been led into these artificial and delusive pastures. If the “Scientist” was once a Christian, then he adopted the “ism” while soured over imagined ill treatment or after neglect of church attendance and prayer, or following days or months of ad-

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mited and willful sinning. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven."

*The basis for all our assurance is the character of the Shepherd.* This we may even learn from the Old Testament. How patiently he led rebellious, doubting Israel through all the checkered days even up to the victories of David's time and the glory of Solomon! He took them across the wilderness through forty long years, keeping them there until they were fitted and capable of entering the promised land. Jesus carefully trained the "slow of heart" disciples for his kingdom's work, and never despaired even when they utterly forsook him. The long-suffering Father has been with the Christian Church through the centuries, with its heathenish imitations, its backslidings, its pride and coldness, its disobedience and blindness. He has been so tender with the unpromising material we have presented him. Like a mother he has waited upon and nourished our slow love and small gratitude into clinging faith and urgent obedience. He it is who

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loves us and broods over us, forgives us and cleanses us, smiles upon us and forgets our doubtings. This is our Shepherd. How can we want any good thing? Let us smile and soothe our hearts under sweet memories as we say, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

When Edward III of England defeated Philip of France, the Black Prince, Edward's son, sent for reenforcements. The king was located on a point where he could see the field and the forces and sent back word, "Tell my son, the Black Prince, that I am too good a general not to know when he needs help, and too kind a father not to send it when I see the need of it." Thus reassured, the prince went confidently into the fight, and won it having put on his crest the words "I serve," words which are on the Prince of Wales's escutcheon to this day. These words carry to us God's attitude. His mercy will not let us be overpressed by enemies, and his goodness will send help when we need it.

# COMFORT AND STRENGTH

## CHAPTER II

### APPETIZING FOOD FOR THE SOUL

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures”

THE five thousand fed by Jesus before being served were seated in small *social groups*. They were then ministered to individually. God speaks to individuals, not to crowds. His appeals and exhortations are personal. Israel imagined that blessings were unchangeably assured to that nation, but the sin of individuals short-circuited the power. Bible promises use the distinctive pronouns. It is not possible for them to miss their aim.

*Gospel milk is soured in unclean vessels*, and so God will put it only into vessels “sanctified and meet” for the Master’s use. The foolish parent permits the untrained child to handle money whose value he does not comprehend. The Kingdom’s currency is never given to spendthrifts. The Father



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must be assured that experience and felt responsibility will direct its expenditure. The State laws guard carefully the privilege of medical practice. Diplomas are closely scrutinized and the standing of the issuing school is examined. Wrong prescriptions and unwise or unskillful surgical operations have caused numerous deaths. The Great Physician has many disciples and healing helpers. He is very careful in requiring training and testings before he issues a diploma that permits us to be successful practitioners. Many souls have shriveled and many careers have been blasted through the bungling work of quack religionists.

God gives the power when heart and head culture insures proper use. Simon the sorcerer was willing to pay money for the ability to bestow the power of the Holy Ghost. People may bolster up their independence and so ignore God by gloating over their goodness. The world must be taught that Christ alone gives ideals, inspiration, and strength sufficient for righteous victories. Selfishly directed efforts must sometimes fail

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in order to teach people a helplessness that looks for instruction; the meekness that inherits the earth. Hard knocks alone impress most of us. Know-it-all folk must come to the end of their string. Big heads resume normal size when bumped against obstacles. After the child tumbles into the mud he is usually willing for the father to hold his hand. God is compelled to permit many things to befall us before we learn obedience.

*Every life is prepared for an exact plan.* Each of us may see a pattern in the mount if we will stay there alone with God. No one else can do our earth-day task. We cannot be satisfied and happy out of it. We must be built up and led if we fill it full. Hence God's directions are personal and specific. "The Lord is MY Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh ME to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth ME beside the still waters." He maketh "all grace abound toward YOU; that YE, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Cor. 9. 8). "My grace is sufficient for THEE" was the answer that came to Paul's

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special plea. "Have not I commanded THEE be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be THOU dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with THEE whithersoever THOU goest" (Josh. 1. 9) was the assurance given to Joshua when he took up Moses's uncompleted task.

The personal tone explains the comforting power of this sweet song of assurance called "The Shepherd Psalm." It appeals to my heart and yours. It brings peace in the noontide glare and amid midnight darkness. It calls out cheerily to the lonely, it whispers to the perplexed in the "madding crowd." It points the way to green pastures in times of adversity and recalls one to lie down for quiet meditation in the hour of abundant prosperity. It touches every real need of life. It is the Master's message to you and to me.

The different translations suggested by Plummer of "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures" are very interesting. Some of them are literal and some are a mere interpretation. Chaldee: "In a dry place he

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makes me to rest in the pleasantness of grass." Vulgate, Ethiopic, and Douai: "He hath set me in a place of pasture." Syriac: "Upon the pastures of strength he shall make me to dwell." Church of England: "He shall feed me in a green pasture." Street: "In pleasant places full of grass he maketh me repose." Briggs translates it, "In grassy pastures he maketh me lie down." Cheyne puts it, "In pastures of young grass he couches me."

Perowne suggests that the Hebrew word translated "pastures" is sometimes rendered "habitations" from a root "to sit, to rest." Clarke phrases it: "cottages of turf or sod," such as the shepherds had in open champaign countries; places in which themselves could repose safely; and pens thus constructed where the flock might be safe all the night. They were inclosures where they had grass or provender to eat. The majority agree with Whedon that the clause refers to the tall and luscious grass plots to which the shepherd led his flocks at the enervating time of midday heat.

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Spurgeon reminds us aptly that "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures" is contemplative, while "He leadeth me beside the still waters" is active. The two must always go together. Mary needed a little of Martha's habits and Martha needed a little of Mary's repose.

Delitzsch says that "pastures" refers to "the pastures of fresh and tender grass." Briggs asserts that it is the pastures "where the tender grass, the young herbage, was abundant." It was appetizing and satisfying.

The "I shall not want" emphasizes the general demands, while the "green grass" brings us more specifically into the realm of the spiritual. Religion can neither be comprehended by nor made attractive to a hungry man. The Earl of Shaftesbury gathered derelicts during the night hours under London Bridge, conducted them to a mission he supported, had them bathed, fed, and put in a good clean bed, and then met them in the morning with the gospel. Everywhere the church and affiliated organizations are in-

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creasingly caring for men's bodies. God's promises touch all of our needs. But it is equally true that the man who sanely cares for his soul will never have a hungry body for a very long period.

*We cannot follow the leading unless we have strength to walk or run.* "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isa. 40. 31). The sheep needed this noontide repose if strength remained for the afternoon pathway. So we need spiritual food if we walk our daily ways. Our lone strength is not sufficient.

We are prone to become cynical and cold. We fail to be brotherly and brightly optimistic. We eat doubts and morally poisoned food and so are weak and sickly. The Shepherd must lead us to the tasteful, satisfying, and strength-giving pastures if such things do not upset us.

*The pastures are green.* After visiting Ireland one readily understands why it is

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called the "Emerald Isle." The very green enlivens. Possibly the steady salt spray makes it so. Sheep thrive best on herbage strong with the brine of the sea. It is appetizing. Palestine doubtless had the same aid. The very outward form helps create a desire for it. Informed dietitians assert that attractive surroundings and table arrangement improve appetite and aid in curing indigestion. Flowers, tasty linen, artistically placed table furnishings, temptingly prepared dishes awaken a desire for food and start the flow of the digestive fluid until the stomach gets ready to assimilate that furnished to it. Spiritual things should be tastefully presented. The minister should avoid a coarse voice, untasty dress, and a boorish bearing. A dull and deadening church atmosphere, because of poor ventilation, should never be permitted. Only the brightest and best can claim to be God's pasture.

Men frequently claim that they were compelled to go to church so much while young that they got sick of it. It is possible to tire one of eggs, the most nutritious food, by al-

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ways preparing them in the same way. If varied in form, as in an omelet or scrambled, fried or boiled, they can be eaten all year. Religion must be varied in its forms. Stupid sameness and routine reasonless rituals tend to nauseate. Religion must be appetizing. If we are real undershepherds we will see to it that the pastures are bright with the green of fresh and varied life. If we follow the Shepherd, he will lead us to that kind. Sleepy, somber, stiff, snapless services have little saving and satisfying power.

*The grass was nutritive.* It was not only green but it had food strength in it. Ritualistic methods are not God-approved unless they contain food properties. If men find no vision of good, no condemnation of bad, no meat for the soul that furnishes them to walk honest paths, then beautiful services and costly buildings are a mockery. We must have not only the form but also the power of godliness. Fine choirs, "great" preachers, cathedral-like surroundings ought to be big helps, but they are not sufficient of themselves. The Pharisees had all of



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these things, but yet they were "hypocrites" because they did not give the children bread.

There will be plenty of grass for all. Some people are afraid to send the gospel abroad for fear we will run short on the supply at home. Note the promises: "Give and it shall be given," "The liberal soul shall be made fat." The close-fisted and cramped in view do not find the green pastures. They nibble on the worn-out fields. Their output of testimony and service is stale.

Dodgers excuse sin by claiming that it is impossible for them to live a clean and upright life. That charge assails both the goodness and the greatness of the Shepherd. He assures us our "portion of meat in due season" (Luke 12. 42). No scorching heat of time or trial can shrivel and sap this pasture. No day is too torrid to wither its freshness and strength. It will afford true rest and sustenance in times of sorest temptations. It will supply all needs now and fit for the next testing time.

*The city soil which produces grass creates*

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*it out of deadly elements.* The crowded dwellers are saved from ill health by patches of green, which green is made by the absorption of the burnt and poisonous gases of the human body which is cast off into the air. So God can use things which would otherwise destroy to feed and build us up. A loss might embitter, but with him as teacher we learn life's real values. An extra burden might crush and break our spirits, but he leads us through Gethsemane and over Calvary's top to Mount Pisgah's ascension. Sorrow might sour us, but his touch of sympathy turns it into a sweetener of our souls so that we become a blessing to others.

Green pastures in our own hearts are notable and give hope to others in arid places. People are bound to recognize souls verdant with cheer; such lives are as attractive and necessary as are oases in the desert.

Our own lives must have the healthiness which God's supplies alone can give if we are able to throw off the diseases that attack our moral nature, for sin assails our souls as tubercular germs do the lungs. God's pas-

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tures furnish this health; they cool and cleanse, as does the tall and luscious grass for the sheep, by color and nourishment.

*Men talk about worshipping God while touring or hiking in the country.* They honestly expect to do so, but usually they go no farther than the flower, the tree or the game they play, and return with little besides physical recreation. They trace no marks of God. When, however, men cultivate the consciousness of God's presence, they find pasturage for the soul everywhere they walk. It may be along the country road with singing birds and fragrant fields. It may be climbing scraggy mountains. It may be struggling with daily business cares in the cramped office.

Ordinary experiences can uncover truths. A little child may cause us to recollect that Jesus said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," and so we will grow meek and teachful and rest on the everlasting arms which are "underneath." The toiling carpenter may bring back memories of our Master, who worked at the bench. The roll-

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ing sea may repicture the command that checked the storm so fraught with terror to the disciples.

If we find our spiritual zest gone, we will be eagerly anxious to walk with him and so develop an appetite. The journey may be along a country road with pilgrims headed toward another Emmaus. But if we talk about the Book and make vivid the promises, we will find that breaking bread at the table with us is the Shepherd himself even as in the old days with the disciples. He still employs normal means to make himself known as in our midst.

It will be well, however, for us to recall the localities where we found pasturage in the past. How, then, can we miss the church service, private devotion, and definite Christian tasks? If we have lost our touch with him, we can find it again just where we parted company.

*We cannot walk with him without finding green pastures.* They will be unfailing in supply. Some kind will be ready at every hour of need. The grass may be hidden

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among the rocks in the rough fields, but it will still be there. It may seem to be held back for a time, but the relish will increase, and gratitude will enable us to appropriate it when it is found. He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.

*A good Shepherd finds choice pasture early in the morning.* The sheep's appetite is then keen and it can lay up strength for the day. Scientists inform us that one secures half of his total knowledge by the time he is seven years old. Is it any wonder that the alert parent and the church lead the child to Christ's pasture in the morning of life? If the appetite is early habituated to demand the "green pastures," he will never be satisfied with husks, even though he wanders away for a time. Jesus took the children in his arms when important business had to be postponed to do it. No under shepherd is greater than his Lord, and therefore dare not neglect the young. Jesus also went into the mountain a great while before day to pray. F. B. Meyer made it his long-time practice never to leave his bedroom un-

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til freshly realizing the fact that Christ dwelt within him.

Create the right religious estimates in youth. Cultivate spiritual insight, as the musician does the ear for harmony or the artist the eye for beauty and symmetry. In his youth, Ruskin's parents would allow him to see or hear no ugly thing if they could avoid it. Do not permit strength to be utterly sapped out by days of waywardness and sin before high spiritual tastes are developed. Much of character must then be torn down before it can be rebuilt solidly.

We need never sit helplessly under a juniper tree. We must not be bled out by the blues. A noted Harvard professor, broken with nervous prostration, came to Dr. Worcester in his healing work in Boston and said, "If you can convince me that God is my Father, I will be a well man, for I can then rest back on him and the strain and wear will cease." So we must know that the loving God never fails or forgets.

*The test of real food is in its sustaining power.* False doctrines give little comfort

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in hours of heavy loss and blinding tears. An old friend left the vital Christian Church to become a Christian Scientist. Later, amid the deep agony of a staggering sorrow, she cried out hopelessly through the avenue of her new "system," but found no answering help in "Mind" and "Love." She needed the Father's arms of comfort.

The prodigal soon became like the swine in his tastes, and hence was satisfied with anything that "filled his belly." Swine represent the lowest form of a total animal nature. They are poisoned by only one weed and can be nourished by almost every kind of food. They grunt and sleep when full of food. But the real man cannot live by bread alone, but also requires "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The Jews expelled by the Russians endeavored to save themselves from starvation by grinding up weeds and mixing them with clay. Appetite ceased to gnaw and grip, but no strength was in this mixture, and the people died. So is it with man's best self if he use substitutes for God's food.

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*As grass is healthy for the sheep so are God's provisions for his folk.* If he provides what sheep need, how much more will he provide what human souls require? There will be plenty for all; the supply will not run out. We will not be strained and unnatural in searching for religious sustenance. We must allow God to speak in the day's ordinary events. He is in his world, and if we retain our simplicity, we will be fully supplied.

An old vizier, once, like David, a tender of sheep, kept in his palace a room furnished like an old shepherd's fold and resorted thither frequently to revive his youth and make teachable his nature. The famous Southerner Mr. Brady once suddenly left heavy duties and returned to his boyhood home. He "said" his prayer at his mother's knee as in childhood days, and then she put him to bed and tucked him in with a good-night kiss. He asked her to do this so that he might be reattuned to life. After two days thus spent in the atmosphere of childhood and its religion, he went back to his



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tasks fresh and new and knowing how to appropriate God in the everyday affairs.

*"He maketh me to lie down"* is both a promise and a command. Jesus needed this kind of help; when the sore temptations of the wilderness ended, angels came and ministered to him. Earth rests its trees and green life through winter's period. If we do not "lie down," we will wear out and break down spiritually. We will faint during hard days or fail to successfully meet life's opportunities. Men who eat while weary frequently bring on indigestion. We may need oftentimes to lie down in the pasture for composure and confidence, before eating that which will refresh us. We can never think our way through many of life's problems without the secluded spots where nothing else pulls at our attention. We need to re-attune ourselves so that we may be certain no foreign matter is diverting God's message and that we are seeking his glory.

We will literally have times of heartening cheer when we can sit or lie in reviving ease or be thrilled by happy friends or

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thoughts. It may be at home amid loved ones on a comfortable winter evening. It may be in a company of congenial associates. It may be in a room fenced in with valued books and the framed photographs of inspiring heroes, with a loved author to read undisturbed. It may be in a prayer meeting that peculiarly saturates the whole being with peace and sweetness. It will be some place where the soul will be soothed by the "joy of the Lord."

One summer, while as a student in charge of the buildings of Boston University School of Theology, the telephone bell rang at 8 A. M. As soon as I rushed down and answered "Hello," it was shut off. In exasperation I called the general manager to know why I was thus regularly troubled. He answered, "We test the wires every morning, to be sure that they are in good order to carry a message if they are needed for that purpose." So we must test to see that our heart lines are open to the directing voice of the Good Shepherd.

*We are in absolute security when he mak-*

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*eth us to "lie down."* Dr. Watkinson tells us that during May in France the fields are covered with lilies of the valley. They so scent the air that hounds tracking the deer are so diverted by the fragrance that they lose the trail. And thus the deer, hard driven through the long winter and early spring, find rest from weariness and a place to build strength for the summer strain, while guarded by God's carpeting lilies.

We will be forewarned against quacks, fanatics, wild prophets and promisers, who may lead us to artificial fields. They have wrought ruin everywhere. Teachers who have insisted on a "second blessing" which would take away all power to sin have so misled some that in utter discouragement they gave up discipleship.

Many who went to church in boyhood and early youth were nauseated by dogmas announced as to be unquestioned even though they could not be rationally established. But this Good Shepherd gladdens us with "a reason," and the food becomes appealingly desirable. Churchgoing need be no

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more of an empty duty than his entrance into green pastures is a burden to the sheep. The sheep will never lie down until well fed and satisfied. We too will find no peace to the soul until we are satisfied by God.

It may be necessary to *make us* lie down in green pastures. We are so constantly dominated by other things that we forget the necessity of and the nourishment which comes from fellowship with Christ. The Shepherd must sometimes compel the sheep to listen. Paul would never have written Philippians had he not lain in prison expecting early martyrdom under cruel Nero, and there found time for visions. Bunyan would have preached only to small groups here and there had he not been imprisoned for the doctrine he proclaimed until leisure and experience made Pilgrim's Progress possible. A dear, sweet girl, told of by Dr. J. R. Miller, said, "I found green pastures in the little white bed of the hospital." Sickness, loss, loneliness may often cause us to lie down in green pastures where we will find nourish-

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ment otherwise either undiscovered or neglected.

*He will enable us to find pasturage when other eyes miss it.* Only Moses saw that the bush was aflame with God. Only Mary heard in the voice of the "gardener" the personality of her Lord. Only Thomas felt in the "wounds" the power of the Resurrected One. How sad it is to see people all about us who miss the green pastures into which the Shepherd would lead them!

We can always use the benefits received to bring blessings to others. A wonderful artist entertained in a home was unable to pay money to his host and desired to leave behind him a token of appreciation. Finding nothing to use as a "canvas" for a painting, he stretched a sheet from the bed to the wall and reproduced on it one of the notable pictures of history.

Delitzsch says that the "green grass promises ease, rest, enjoyment." The "White Comrade" gives the story of the brother who returned home healed but disfigured. He had been wounded in battle, and his sister

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was cheered when she heard that he was recovering. They had grown up together as chums. He had graduated with honor from Oxford and had then enlisted. When, however, word came that his leg had been amputated, the sister's heart was broken, and she was almost ready to cry out, "O, if he had only died!" She met him at the train as he was returning, and after a severe struggle could not longer hold back the rebellious tears. He comforted her by saying: "Sister, do not sorrow over the loss of the leg. I have really not lost anything." She looked at him in a new way and found that though his face was drawn and emaciated, there was a personality there she had not before noticed. She asked how it came, and he answered: "Do not ask me, now." In the old "den" at home he told her.

"One night, after a day of suffering and complaint, a man walked in the hospital door. My attention was attracted and I thought he was a new doctor. But he walked calmly over to my bed and I noticed that he was all in white. In a voice sweetly natural

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with interest and with a hand rare with gentle sympathy he touched my brow and said, 'My brother, won't you let me help you bear this burden?' I looked up into his commanding eyes, and suddenly all the burden and distress and complaint left me, and I knew that it then mattered no longer whether I had two legs or not. My burden was lifted. I then saw that it was the White Comrade about whom other comrades had told me."

And so the Good Shepherd came to him in his dire weakness with the needed ease.

# COMFORT AND STRENGTH

## CHAPTER III

### REFRESHMENT AMID LIFE'S BEWILDERMENTS

“He leadeth me beside the still waters”

SANDOW, the noted strong man, laughed with derision and quickly accepted a wager that he could endure to have one pint of water poured on his hand drop by drop. At the fortieth drop he still smiled, at the fiftieth drop cringed, at the sixtieth he wrinkled his brow, at the seventieth the skin broke, and at the eightieth he gave up the wager. We cannot stand the persistent wear of little things.

When Dr. Jowett first came to New York, he remarked that in this city everybody looked strangely weary and worn and few smiled. Amid a city's noise and crowding hurry there does come a tenseness requiring a still hour for rebuilding the spirit. Our modern day brings this keyed-up state into most regions.



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*A quiet mind rests the body even when the eyes refuse to sleep.* God's peace is better than any opiate. The Shepherd's care will banish all torturing specters. Jesus went to prepare a mansion for us, but he left his peace for our heart's ease. Every life led by our Lord will have its needed rest times.

Sleeplessness is misery beyond description. The brain works and burns until at times balance is lost. The nerves ache and throb while the town clock strikes off hour after hour. The dawn comes to smarting eyes and lead-heavy limbs and deadened mind. "He giveth his beloved sleep." His soothing brings slumber as the cradling arms of the mother quiet the fretful babe. The outdoor air insures it when everything else fails. The green grass pillow induces it. The sweetening presence and protection of the Good Shepherd lulls away fears and lifts depressing cares in the breathed atmosphere of love.

Food tastes good when eaten in a happy atmosphere. It then adds strength, brightens the brain, and creates good feeling. No

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hard worker can afford to miss his meals, carry a heavy spirit to his table, or permit them to be broken by callers or business. It is one of his resting places.

Sunday laws are not made to break into our personal liberty, but to shield us from soul ill health. Noisy baseball, hilarious excursions, commercial activities spoil possible meditation periods for the day, which are needed so that we can walk beside the still waters of freshening worship. It was made to be a rest day; rest with God is always recreating. A European Sunday will turn our holy day into a holiday and our warm worship into cold formalism. We require the quiet of one day in seven.

*Isaiah invites folks freely in: "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."* Dr. Spurgeon calls attention to the fact that water is refreshing, wine is inspiriting, and milk is nourishing. All of this is included here in the still waters. Our Shepherd has walked earth, and knows

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our need of refreshment and where to find it. We can trust him confidently, and follow with peace in our hearts. At the needed time he will find for us the "still waters."

Plummer furnishes several varied translations for "*He leadeth me*," as follows: Septuagint: "He hath led me by the waters of quietness." Church of England: "He shall lead me forth beside the waters of comfort." Calvin: "He leadeth me to gently flowing waters." Street: "Unto waters inviting to rest he gently leadeth me." Further translations are: Perowne: "Beside waters of rest doth he guide me." Cheyne: "To reposeful waters he gently guides me." Briggs: "Unto refreshing waters he leadeth me."

*Christ is not a herder, but a Shepherd.* If he drove us, that would make of us a machine and not allow us to build a godlike personality. The Germans, with their theory of military government, have their officers in the rear of the men, driving them forward. But the officers of the Allies always lead.

Christians never stand still. No "second

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blessing" can fit us out completely. We push toward the "mark." We grow as the wheat, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." We are satisfied only when we "awake with thy likeness" (Psa. 17. 15). We are marching to the promised land; we have not yet reached it. We can build no tabernacles in which to remain on the mount of transfiguration; the valley holds tasks to test our faith and utilize our blessings. To-day's experience must be better than that of yesterday. He leads on.

"To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Follow promptly. "Behold, now is the accepted time." We are not left to ourselves. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." All sorts of questions will be solved for us. Every day and deed affects our souls.

Generals Foch, Haig, and Pershing pray, as do President Wilson and every member of the Cabinet. It is the same with English statesmen. The materialistic leader seldom wins. The well-balanced man is

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physically, mentally, and spiritually fed. The day is coming when the spiritually undeveloped will be as incompetent as the mentally undeveloped is now. Then God can speak guidance in all things.

The Good Shepherd meets and slays all destructive foes ahead of us. He first wades through the floods. He never asks the impossible. We will not cover pioneer country—the Master goes before us.

*Christ's disciples must lend cooperation if they are to grow into his likeness.* Who-soever "will" may drink of the water. He may make us to lie down, but he cannot compel us to drink of the water of life. Folks who complain that a religious service is "dry" are usually to blame themselves. They do not cooperate with a willful opening of their whole nature. God is not limited to bringing "water" in the music or even in the message, but the soul that thirsteth will find refreshment in the very atmosphere. "Blessed are they that . . . thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

Many folk are not interested in seeking

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the fountain Christ opened because they have not yet seen the Shepherd and do not know its value. It is our privilege to introduce men to Jesus, for, seeing him, they will seek to follow.

The sheep may be ever so thirsty, but fear will keep them away from the water unless it is put in a trough or shut into a pool, where it will be quiet. Many have an indescribable fear of a church service, and those that stay away will miss the water that will refresh and brighten their lives. A minister friend recently ate dinner at a hotel with a traveling man who protested in vigorous and profane speech against the miserable luck which shut him on Sunday into so small a town where there was nothing to do. After a natural and intimate visit, my friend invited him to church that night where he himself was to preach. The traveling man, utterly amazed that this human being was a preacher, agreed to come. After the service he met the minister and declared, while tears ran down his cheeks: "When my wife learns that I went to church to-night she will be

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gladdened deeply. Fear and prejudice have also been removed, so that it will be easier to go the next time. I did not know a church service could so invigorate and lift a man."

*We will not always be led to the still waters, when our thirst first appears.* But He who was compelled in agony to say "I thirst," will not fail to meet our need before we utterly faint. Do not, therefore, complain of your crosses and hard times. Recall the soldiers who take steady training amid many deprivations and with homesick hearts. They smile hopefully, though they know constant sacrifice will be required through the war and that certain death is ahead for many of them. They glow and cheer and grow and aspire under it all. Shall we then moan as we follow the cross, or shall we be as cheery as the soldiers who follow the flag? Our Shepherd will not allow us to be exhausted any more than the government will fail to give necessary supplies.

The shepherd maps out all the streams

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and watering places scattered over the grazing lands. He plans to lead the sheep there at just the ripe moment. Country boys remember how they stopped the mower or the reaper near the field spring ever so often during the hot summer day for a cooling draught. How it did revive one!

The shepherd's own experience interprets the sheep's need. So it is with our Shepherd. He lived as a man. He was "tempted in all points like as we are." He walked life's dusty roads. He was weary, hungry, and throat-parched. He wept heart-drying tears. He thirsted for loyal friendship and sympathy. And he went away into heaven with the earth-scarred body. It will remind him of our needs. No life is forsaken. There are no outcasts. God has water of cleansing and refreshment for all. Help arrives hourly.

*When we know the Shepherd we will gladly accept what comes.* A visitor to a French hospital found that all the patients were on the veranda except one. He went to this one and asked, "Why are you not out



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with the others?" The patient, as a reply, lifted the spread to show that both feet were gone. Pitying words were spoken by the visitor, but the soldier struck them aside by the declaration, "Do not pity me. I offered my life to my country, but she only took my two feet."

Another French soldier, met by a buoyant American lad who had just come over, revealed the fact that one arm was gone. The American, eager to sympathize, said, "How sad it is to see that you have lost your arm." The French soldier straightened up, looked back at him with a gleam in his eye, and said, "Lost it? Oh, no, you are mistaken. I *gave* it."

So shall we give ourselves with utter confidence when we know the Shepherd.

Briggs says: "Unto refreshing waters, not 'beside' or 'along side of' [A. V. and R. V.], not thinking of a stream which is not easy to find in the grazing lands of Palestine except in the rainy season; but 'unto'—thinking of the wells, or fountains, from which flocks are usually watered." We can-

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not always be within the close reach of the refreshing draught, but there will be an oasis in every desert.

We do not attend church to pick out the mistakes of grammar, the musical discords, the coldness of the ushers, or the awkwardness of the minister. "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink," said Jesus. "Water" is promised in spite of service or preacher. So in our worship time, we seek to come directly to the Master. No crude or personally irritating service, or human conditions can then keep us from finding the water.

*Dr. Spurgeon reminds us that the Holy Spirit is to do for us all that water does. It will "cleanse, refresh, fertilize, and cherish." And it does that in a permanent and upbuilding way. A stimulant or a drug may revive for a brief period and demand as its price depression and degeneration afterward. Christ's water is real food; it feeds the spirit of man and that dominates all else. Paul said, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the*

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Spirit." Alcoholic spirits do stimulate temporarily, but they also lead one to poor judgment, to extravagance and to an upset of his poise. He who is drunk with power overbalances and seeks revenge. He who is drunk with greed will grind down little children. Even the one who is intoxicated by learning is likely to neglect the weightier matters of the law. God's spiritual thrilling will lift us, as will no other, and at the same time will keep us well proportioned and well poised in our activities.

*Any kind of recreation which shuts out the Shepherd is dangerous.* It is unworthy of best manhood. There is no question about the harm of gambling or drinking or licentiousness; they may bring temporary recreation, but ultimately they destroy far beyond the profit of pleasure. All enduring recreation is approved by God; man needs its freshening.

Peter Cartwright was invited to dance, while stopping at a country inn. He selected his partner and just before the dancing began declared, "I never do anything

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without first asking the blessing of God upon that which I am doing." Holding the hand of his partner, he led out into the middle of the hall and knelt and prayed so fervently that a tremendous revival broke out in place of the dance. We will never enter a pleasure that God cannot bless. We do not need to be severely somber, for he will see that richest joys recreate and keep us sweet and natural.

*We cannot do without the water of life.* Men have fasted for forty or fifty days, but no one ever existed many hours without fluid. Water is a health helper. It will wash out a cold, cool an inflammation, soothe a fever, enrich the blood. Jesus is exact in his figures. He called believers the "salt of the earth." No living thing, plant, animal, or human, can live long without salt. Man cannot work without light; Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world." Fish in Mammoth Cave, where it is perpetually dark, lose their power to see. Jesus is also pertinent here in using water as a symbol of God's provision for our needs.

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It is foolish to conclude that immersion in itself, because a large amount of water is used, will be more beneficial than sprinkling, because a smaller amount is used. It is contrary to the whole spirit of Christ to expect the wine or the bread at the communion service to affect the spiritual being, simply because they are taken from a priest's or minister's hand; they must be spiritually appropriated by the individual.

We are refreshed by a simple drink of water, in our very spiritual life, if we see in it God's care and love. David, when Absalom revolted, and it seemed as though defeat and death were certain, expressed a wish for a drink of water from a spring which he had known in the sweet free days of youth. Intimate companions, hearing him, risked their lives to get the water and brought it back. When he received it, the rush of memory made vivid the good care of his Shepherd since those early days. To make notable that freshening reminder he poured the water out on the ground as a sacrifice offering to God. In that use of the water

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it was more invigorating than if he had drunk it.

*It will be "still" waters.* "Be still, and know that I am God." In the terrible times through which the world must often pass, we need to stop and realize that God is on his throne. Garfield thus gathered the nation together when Lincoln was assassinated and anarchy threatened. "God lives and the government at Washington is safe" was his message. We cannot understand or see the end of some terrible happenings. Evil men may temporarily block God's will, but all history shows that in spite of setbacks civilization shows steady progress.

Spurgeon says: "They are still waters, for the Holy Spirit loves peace, and sounds no trumpet of ostentation in his operations." The "still," says Adam Clarke, suggests that the "waters" are deep and hence cool. The same thought is carried by Briggs when he translates it "refreshing waters."

Since the "waters" are the outflowing of springs, hill fed, they are pure and abundant. They slake the thirst. They do not

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play out. So it is with all God's supplies. He gives us far beyond what "we ask or think." He gives us all things "richly to enjoy." People have heart thirst; they are lonely and long to be loved. The assurance comes, "As my Father hath loved me even so love I you."

The Shepherd takes account of the sheep's fears, often unreasoning, and prepares the water so the sheep drink it in conscious security. His presence and reassurance banishes fear that would spoil the drink. They know the voice of the shepherd, and so come to him naturally and implicitly. To make their thirst known is to be sure of being satisfied.

A little lad was compelled to tend his sheep upon Sabbath days when everyone else passed him on the way to church. He had lately been told about the Good Shepherd. A sympathetic gentleman who passed found him on his knees with his hands folded and stopped a moment to listen. He discovered that the boy was saying his A B C's and inquired the occasion. The lad,

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startled a bit, rose from his knees and said, "I do not know any regular prayer, but I felt the need of my heavenly Shepherd, and not knowing how to put it in words I merely said my A B C's, knowing that he would take them and spell out what I really needed."

*God may permit us to be forsaken by human kind so that we will search for him in the quiet places.* Major James H. Cole was a successful business man, and suddenly, through no fault of his own, lost all his fortune. In his utter loneliness and despair he cried out for direction and was sent into the evangelistic field, where he won thousands to Christ. George H. Matheson, losing his eyesight, was then rejected by his sweetheart, with whom in the vision days of love he had built glorious air castles. Sitting in his loneliness, he wrote the heavenly harmonies that are contained in such books as *Times of Retirement*, which have brought "water" to the souls of men. The very acme of his steady source of supplies is in this:



## FROM THE SHEPHERD PSALM

“O Love that wilt not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in thee.  
I give thee back the life I owe,  
That in thine ocean depths its flow  
May richer, fuller be.”

*Our Shepherd has charted all the land.* He knows the road that leads to the still waters from any point of our life. He may find us at honor's crossroad, or at the close of disheartening defeat, or on the gay field of prosperity and success, or amid the dark gloom of a blinding loss from death's onslaught; it matters not—he knows the way to the still waters and there will be the green grass of repose along whose edge the lulling stream will sing us into rest. He speaks and all storms stop.

The world is wide  
In time and tide,  
And God is guide—  
Then do not hurry.

That man is blest  
Who does his best  
And leaves the rest—  
Then do not worry.

# COMFORT AND STRENGTH

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BEST SELF KEPT MASTERFUL

“He restoreth my soul”

DELITZSCH asserts that the twenty-third psalm was written by David during the time of Absalom's revolt. If that is correct, and David wrote it then, he was under heavy depression at the time, and needed cheer. It is certain to banish discouragement, awaken sustained enthusiasm and equip for any experience.

War days darken the horizon and depress the spirit. But when the night is black, we more fully enjoy the sunshine of the day that follows. The Rev. Dr. M. L. Robinson, in a report to the New York Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, declared that amid the five million people of greater New York there were only fifty thousand Methodists. Out of the two million people in the

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suburbs there were only fifty-four thousand. In the Bronx there is one Methodist to every one hundred and twenty-three people, in Manhattan one to every one hundred and thirty-four, while in the country at large there is one to every twenty people. Other denominations fare no better. Such facts might utterly discourage effort in a great city. But since God is with us, who can estimate the outcome? Even Nineveh repented.

*Nature mends every rent.* A cut finger is aided immediately by the salt which is withdrawn from all other excretions and sent to that particularly hurt place. Near Petersburg, Virginia, is the old crater where the mine was blown up under the direction of General Grant, to open a way into the Confederate territory. Hundreds were destroyed and terrific gashes were cut in the earth, but it is all healed over now with growing grass. Near by was located Camp Lee, where the Pennsylvania troops celebrated General Lee's birthday, and the Virginia troops celebrated Lincoln's, and in one

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mighty chorus they all sang "The Star-spangled Banner." God's Fatherhood may one day make earth's nations one family.

The English grew tyrannical in their treatment of the American colonies, but having learned a lesson in the Revolution were able to help save France from the despotism of Napoleon. Democracy was thus greatly advanced. The liberty ideals of the republic of the United States were being sapped by the cancer, slavery, and only the Civil War removed it. But these forces all advanced by wars against each other are now united in the common purpose to give democracy to the whole world and are fighting to that end. The very contests which these nations had among themselves made dearer to them the ideal for which they are now fighting together.

Empowerment does not come from a peace secured by seclusion. The ship held through the storm by a rock-gripping anchor best represents life. Jesus did not plan a hermitage. Paul gloried because he had "fought a good fight." The crown goes to

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those coming out of "great tribulation." Paul's "thorn" was not removed, but sufficient sustaining grace was supplied to enable him to bear it. One unwilling to carry a cross was called an unworthy disciple. The heat of the day must be endured if the cool of the evening is enjoyed. The "still waters" do not mean that there will be no feet-blistering pathways.

"Still" waters does not mean a "still" tongue. We need often to cry aloud and spare not. Of the twenty-three ministers in Springfield during Lincoln's campaign twenty were opposed to him. When he discovered the fact his heart was greatly burdened. That was sad, but in the end, however, Lincoln's greatest encouragement and aid came from the churches and Christian leaders.

*No man can meet life's demands unaided.* Good resolutions alone are flimsy supporters. We war not only against flesh and blood, but "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high

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places" (Eph. 6. 12). Our vision should be clear. Optimism must be as regular as the heart beat, effort as steady as breathing. But courage fails, strength is limited, and wisdom is so shortsighted. We must be revived, saved from mistakes, led back from sidetracks and wrong tacks. We must be encouraged at the core of our lives.

We have been too prone to accept prosperity as a token of God's affection and blessing. It has often instead brought a curse. Rome degenerated under it. America wanders from God when money gives great ease. God measures his blessings by the effect upon the spiritual life of the people.

At whatever cost, our souls must be restored, recreated, revived. The Good Shepherd insures that if we follow him, for "He restoreth the soul." And then, though they may kill the body, they cannot hurt the soul. Though they may starve the stomach, they cannot bring famine upon the soul.

Different translations always shed light. Plummer fathers many. Here are his quotations: "The Septuagint, Syriac, Ethiopic,

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Vulgate and Douai: 'He hath converted my soul.' Venema: 'He shall refresh my soul.' Amesius: 'He maketh my soul quiet.' Fry: 'He reneweth my strength.' Hengstenberg: 'He revives my soul.' "

The Syrian Guest suggests "Restores me when wandering." Delitzsch says that the Hebrew word "signifies to bring back the soul that is, as it were, flown away, so that it comes to itself again, therefore to impart new life, 'recreate.' This he does to the soul by causing it amid the dryness and heat of temptation and trouble to taste the very essence of life which refreshes and strengthens it." Spurgeon says, "When the soul grows sorrowful, he revives it; when it is sinful, he sanctifies it; when it is weak, he strengthens it." Whedon says, "He bringeth back my soul, as a sheep that had strayed" (Matt. 18. 12, 13; 1 Peter 2. 25). The word for "restoreth" means "to return, bring back," or, figuratively speaking, "convert."

*Briggs says, "The soul is here, as usually in Hebrew, the seat of the appetites and de-*

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*sires.*” Dr. Cheyne says, “The soul is the conscious, individualized principle of life.” The old teachers, quoting 1 Thess. 5. 23, taught that man was three-parted, trichotomy, or composed of spirit, soul, and body. “Spirit is the highest in man, the organ of divine life and communion with God, the seat of the divine indwelling; while the soul is the seat of the natural human life, where dwell and act the naturally used faculties of the conscious being” (William Newton Clark, in *An Outline of Christian Theology*, p. 183). Later theologians teach that “soul” and “spirit” are used interchangeably. “The nonbodily part of man may be viewed in its relation to God, or in its relation to the life that it is living in the body on the earth” (Clark, p. 183). This makes man two-parted, dichotomy. If he develops his soul toward God, he is spiritual.

When the soul is “restored,” our keen sense of the Indwelling God supplies courage and wisdom. We may have wandered from his pathway or hidden because shamed by our sin. We may have been blinded by



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despairing doubt or discouraged by defeat. Whatever be the cause of soul faintness, he will revive, restore our souls by bringing us face to face with the freshening consciousness of his love. If the soul be strong, one shall "chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight." "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

*Culture alone will not give moral discrimination nor open the vision windows into the future life. But soul health gives tone, purpose, and victory to all life. It makes real a future day of glory that turns all trials and toil into ultimate helps. It reveals righteousness as a practical asset. If the soul faint and die, then man is only an animal. He is lonely, forlorn, and uncharted. He becomes the slave instead of the master of his lower nature. God does not merely pity us in our distress and discomfort, but empowers us to walk out of the valley of despair.*

Bees flit about and find honey in most unexpected places. Our restored souls may discover amid unpromising surroundings

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stimulants and supplies for our best self. No doctrine is true unless it feeds us so that we can rise above material things. When the soul is "restored" we do not faint from shame over the sense of our sin, but, rather, go to the fountain of cleansing with confidence. We do not despair hopelessly as we face our apparent worthlessness, but quickly recall that even the one-talented man is needed. We dare not sit in idleness amid futile excuses, for we remember that to each one a task is assigned; growth comes only in the exercise of service.

If our best selves sleep, then greed will turn us into heartless tyrants, or lust transform us into beasts, or pride send us strutting through life satisfied, like the peacock, with mere gaudy display. The Germans, neglecting their souls and building instead a heartless efficiency, become demoniacally possessed and end in worshiping Satan as God.

Dr. E. T. Shelly, a skilled medical expert, tells of an experiment in the treatment of a simpleton. Scientists had con-

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cluded that the child remained in an infancy state because one of the necessary glands was starved out by another gland which stole away its food. He undertook to furnish artificial food to the starved gland. The experiment succeeded. Both glands were equally fed, and in a few months the child became poised, natural, and intelligent, and though six or eight years of age began immediately to grow out of infancy. That illustrates what happens to humans who neglect the soul. They lose the sense of proportion in ordering their lives, and in comparison with well-balanced sons of God they are "simpletons"; they remain infants and do not become stalwarts.

*An artist trains his senses to differentiate colors exactly and exquisitely. A musician develops his sense of hearing until he is peculiarly sensitive to discords, and so becomes able to work out beautiful harmonies. A spiritually minded soul will develop his sense of God until everywhere he will see God's ways and work at every task as assigned by him. The soul will be kept so healthy that it*

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will appropriate all its surroundings for up-building; or, to change the figure, the sheep will be so in fellowship with the shepherd, that when it needs green grass or still waters they will be furnished in right proportion to keep the sheep capable of living its own life.

Dr. Fisk, in *Life Everlasting*, insists that the brain is merely the medium through which the soul expresses itself. Materialists have tried to insist that the soul and brain were identical, and that when one perished both did so. Dr. Bowman, a celebrated physician who gave much of his life to the study of immortality from the standpoint of physiology, insists that not only is the brain the medium of the soul but that the soul creates the brain. He instances the case of Helen Keller, whose personality he says was asleep, until Miss Sullivan awakened and so directed it that the brain was developed until she could mentally hear, speak, and act.

*We are not strangers to God; we are his sons and daughters.* The sheep are never wild and unclaimed; they do not roam around at will. They are the property of

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somebody. God added to his normal ownership the purchase of Christ's redemption. We have a natural point of contact with God. We must beware lest the soul be lulled to sleep. African natives die by the score from the "sleeping sickness." They imagine that they are dozing off into restful ease when poison is slowly deadening their senses until death ensues. The victim of freezing must by vigorous exercise be kept from dying, else drowsiness will make him sit in idleness, until the frost stops his heart beat.

General Pershing cabled to Washington early in the war for one thousand white mice and one thousand canary birds. The War Department traced carefully through all the codes, hoping to find the hidden message these words carried. But in vain. When about to despair, an officer who had just come from General Pershing's headquarters at the front interpreted it. "The General wants just what he has requisitioned. When poison gas first begins to come, white mice and canaries detect it when no other living thing can do so, and give warning. The white

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mouse scratches his nose and the canary ruffles his feathers." The soldiers can then put on their gas masks in time and be prepared to meet the deadly fumes. So we must be made sensitive, by the indwelling Spirit, so that we will be forewarned and ready when Satan's poison gases are turned upon our souls.

The lieutenant who discovered the south pole told John R. Mott of a man who sat still and laughed when warned that he was freezing and replied, "I never felt better in my life; it is foolish to tell me that." It was only when they beat him vigorously that he was awakened to the fact that he was actually freezing and must exert himself energetically to save his life.

Darwin said regarding his walking amid the marvelous forests of Brazil: "Once when I visited these Brazilian forests I wrote that man is more than his breath. Now I have no such feelings concerning man's immortality, having lost them through misuse." And he adds pathetically, "Unbelief crept over me so slowly that faith went away

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without pain." We must keep our souls "restored."

When the prodigal came to himself he returned to his father's house. He gave up his old unnatural bad habits. The image of God in him was restored to power. He was put back into the way of life, having been brought out of the way of death in which he did not belong. "Holiness" and "wholeness" are interchangeable words in the translation of the Greek. If we do not enjoy a prayer meeting and find it dry, then we need a restoration, just as the man who has no appetite needs remedies which will restore him to health.

*In prayer and meditation periods, we store up strength so that we will be able to endure the storm that bursts unexpectedly upon us. Israel gathered manna every day. It is typical of spiritual food. Physical strength slips away and is revived by regular meals. Temptations exhaust us. We must have soul-freshening. Life is such a humdrum. Our work seems unimportant, we appear to be so obscure. We minimize our-*

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selves and grow morose. Then He restores us. We are reminded that the one faithful in that which is least will be promoted. We recall that a cup of water given in His name will not go unnoticed. In due time we shall reap if we faint not. The Spirit witnesses that we are "joint heirs with Jesus Christ." The sky grows red with promise and every common bush is aglow with God. So we are restored and start out with new stimulus to do the common things for the glory of God.

Do you recollect how the teacher honored us by assigning a task to be done for her? Possibly we would gather whips that were to be used for punishment and then find ourselves to be the first culprit. Or we watered the plants, dusted the desk, or ran an errand, and were thrilled by the privilege of doing it for the teacher. We may discover that the tiniest tasks can be done for our Lord Christ. New impulse and inspiration come to us as they do to the woman become a mother ministering to her own babe.

He heals the backsliding of individuals as well as of nations. He begins upon the heart



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in a perfectly natural and progressive way. Peter saw in his Master's eye the grieved disappointment over the wrathful denial. That drove him out to weep bitterly. Jesus remembered his penitence, and when he arose from the dead he gave instructions; go tell the disciples "and Peter." A little later Peter, in utter discouragement, went back to his old business as a fisherman. Jesus followed him, prepared breakfast by the water-side, and having fed the weary disciples, turned to Peter and said "Lovest thou me?" An affirmative reply brought Peter the privileged assignment, "Feed my sheep."

Plummer says, "It is, however, a blessed truth that God has in his gospel cordials for the fainting and correctives for the straying."

Spurgeon quotes Thomas Dale as saying: "The subjects experimentally treated in this verse are, first, the believer's liability to fall, or deviate even within the fold of the church, else wherefore should he need to be 'restored'? Next the promptitude of the Good Shepherd to interpose for his rescue." He

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also quotes J. Thornton as saying, "The same hand which first rescued us from ruin reclaims us from all our subsequent aberrations." Men never forget the old joy of fellowship with Christ, though they do not at once come back. He can and will restore it and lead into new service.

*Hopeless sorrow is banished by Christ's empty tomb.* We know, then, that death has no power and faith thrills and lifts us. In lonely tramps, we discover that another is by our side. Our hearts burn within us, even as did the hearts of the pilgrims on the way to Emmaus. He does walk our highways still. We will be given loads just large enough for us to carry. Cross-bearing will build faith, for we will suddenly discover that we can endure the things that were once impossible. This convinces that growth has occurred, and that God's manna nourishes.

A lost child hails with bounding joy one who can guide him home. Only those with a similar experience can understand the prodigal's feelings when he found the father waiting for him. Mary said "Rabboni" on that

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first Easter morning with a heart melody impossible for us to reproduce. The dining disciples could not tell the others how they felt when the Master opened their eyes at the Emmaus inn. Fletcher in his prayer closet cried out for fear lest the happiness of flooding blessings burst his heart. The joy of our recognized Lord will be our portion and bring a personally peculiar experience. It will not lift us over the hills but give us strength to surmount them.

*The shepherd keeps the sheep in health and does not merely pick them up when they faint by the wayside.* Our Shepherd will prescribe for us until we have an appetite for the "green grass" and "still waters." We will use the means of grace within our reach and there gather fresh strength. Briggs says, "By the rich provision for eating and drinking, he revives, strengthens, restores to full activity and enjoyment."

Doubting Thomases will still need to see the wounds upon the body of Christ. The Master will not disappoint them, and so he needs us to incarnate those wounds and

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scars. We may, therefore, be called to suffer persecution and loss without complaint or darkening of faith before the eyes of the world. Jesus will still take the babes in his arms as of old when he said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," but he may use you to be those arms by offering you homeless French and Belgian orphans or those nearer by, to mother. Everywhere are sad and lonely hearts, hungry for the messages of the Master, which we may bear in a glad body refreshed by and in the act.

*We must watch and pray.* It must be a daily practice. Manna could not be stored, lest the sense of dependence upon God be lost. Church attendance, prayer meeting participation, private devotion must, then, be regular and frequent.

Peter wanted to build tabernacles upon the transfiguration mount so that the three disciples could stay there with the Master in their enjoyment. But Jesus taught the ever-true lesson that soul blessings are only to equip us to carry relief to the sad and enslaved ones in life's valleys.

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We will have strength for trials, not deliverance from all of them. We will not be taken out of the world, but will be equipped to win. Perowne quotes Stopford Brooke: "He does not only give us comfort; that would weaken character. He gives us power; for the true comforter is the strengthener in pain, not the remover of pain." So the restoration does not lift us out of the valley by unseen hands, but gives strength to walk out. God does not miraculously take off the burden, but gives power to stand up under it. We do not avoid any duty, but claim courage and ability to squarely face every task.

*There is no public exposé of our faults and failures.* As does a skilled physician, so he gives us private examination and prescription. No one will be cast off. Even Judas could have been restored had he been willing to repent. "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Even sins do not shut us away if we repent. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." Mary Magdalene found answer

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to her penitence and went away cleansed to be a fragrant blessing. There are no privileged classes. "Whosoever will" may come.

*No cross presses down upon our shoulders or heart but what He has felt its weight.* None will be allowed to utterly faint. If we had no wearying cross, we would not sympathize with earth's woes. If our wounds never bled, we could not be tender of touch in binding up others' cuts. When Dr. Howe, whose wife, Julia Ward Howe, wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," determined to study the blind with the hope of bringing help to their minds and hearts, he found that he must enter into real sympathy with them. Every day for many weeks during long periods he went about his work with his eyes bandaged so that he could not see a single thing. In this way he could understand the feelings of the blind people to whom he desired to minister. So was he able to be touched with the feelings of their infirmities and help them.

Bishop Simpson in his Yale lectures on preaching tells of the first effort made in the

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United States to train an imbecile. A wealthy young doctor studied the European methods for months and then returned and advertised for the worst obtainable case. A boy nine years old who had never made a conscious movement was secured. For six months the doctor lay on the floor by the side of this mass of flesh and read to it. Then he was about to give up in despair because there appeared to be no conscious movements. But suddenly he saw the lips move, and he then put himself in touch with the child, and ultimately taught him to do and recite many things. The doctor put himself by the child until he caught his inner life, then lifted him up toward his level. That Christ came also to do for our souls.

Captain Arthur Hunt Chute, who was a newspaper correspondent during the Mexican and Balkan Wars, went out with the first Canadian contingent and was in the thickest of the fight before Ypres. When he came into the war he was asked, "What church do you belong to?" and answered "O, put me down as an atheist." He ex-

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plained: "I did not want to be bothered by any driveling chaplain." But later he was sorely wounded and lay for six months in the hospital. During that period he fought his way through to God and saw things which before he did not understand. In an address he said: "At Ypres the Allies were completely whipped. All about us were the bloated forms of my comrades who had never before known poison gas which had been thrown upon them. The onrushing Germans might easily have marched into Paris had not something stopped them. What was it? The hand of God had written, '*Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther.*' I asked two or three of the defending officers how they explained the fact that we were not defeated. With calmness and a softening eye they answered. 'It was all the work of the White Comrade.'" So it comes to pass that our Good Shepherd can lead beside the still waters, even though the forces of hell seem to rush madly against us through dark and lonely days.



# FROM THE SHEPHERD PSALM

## CHAPTER V

### GUIDED RIGHTLY THROUGH ACTIVE DAYS

“He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for  
his name’s sake”

DR. BRIGGS holds that the figure in the psalm here changes from a Shepherd to a Guide. If that be granted, the symbol is still unspoiled.

An Alpine guide was seen, from the hotel veranda, leading three people over the mountain pathway, when suddenly one slipped, and the others, falling, were held from death only by the rope that was attached to the guide’s body. He calmly took his knife, cut the rope and let them drop into the precipice. On his return he was so avoided and condemned for his cowardice that soon afterward he committed suicide. The guide will give his life, if worthy of the title, for those who follow him. Christ did.

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Financiers boasted bravely that they would stop the war. Earlier they announced that without their consent the war could not start. Commerce alone has not spread civilization, but has rather increased rivalry and jealousy. Art achieves its highest form only when it approaches Christian conceptions in its productions.

*Unaided reason never saves a nation from degeneracy.* Greece at highest development of intelligence was still low in life and habits. Rome with all its boasted culture grew degenerate in its moral practices and finally fell to pieces. Paris set up a goddess of Reason in the Notre Dame Cathedral, but the city went from worse to still worse. Paul persecuted Christians with a good conscience. Women throw their babes into the Ganges in sincere devotion to their false gods. A better guide must be furnished to us than any natural gift we possess; we cannot do without God's Spirit.

To secure this guidance we must be righteous. An emotional experience alone is not sufficient; ethics must sustain it. "He that

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doeth righteousness is righteous, but he that doeth sin is of the devil." The kingdom of God is "righteousness." "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly?" Paul urged the followers of Christ to "awake to righteousness and sin not." "Pure religion and undefiled before God the Father is this, to visit . . . and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Cheyne tells us that these are paths "traced along the line of divine standards." They are a fixed measure by which all other righteousness is estimated. In the London Parliament Buildings carefully shut away are the official commercial standards of Great Britain. Every twenty years they are taken out, and all the weights, yardsticks, and measures of the kingdom are tested by them. So our Guide or Shepherd tests our personal ideas of right and wrong.

We are followers of the Shepherd and must frequently leave the "green grass" and "still waters" and walk in the harder ways.

*God wants man to worship him with the beauty of holiness. Soul health is mani-*

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festated by Christlikeness. Slavery to sin exhibits a sick soul. Man is free and happy only when God's image shines out in him. The Master's remedial work is exerted to keep the best in us free. Any bad habit that orders obedience makes us less a man. Christ came not to save us for heaven but to set us free for high living on earth. God keeps the soul in order so that we can recognize sin's effect and have power to say "No."

The soul is the ear that hears God. If it be dead, then are we deaf to his directions, but if alert, then we hear and know his ways. The psalm is logical in its progress. The "grass" and "water" restored the soul and are prepared for "leading." The "restored" soul gives us a keen sense of the nearness of God, who guides us into all truth.

If he leads, it will be according to our strength, and it will be a safe path. After the Shepherd has restored our soul he can lead us securely even though the path be across the deserts and through the mountains on narrow ways. Some translate the verb "leadeth," others "hath led," and others

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“will lead,” but whatever the form, “he faileth never.”

His guidance is given for his name's sake. Jehovah was Israel's God. In bygone days a defeat for a particular nation meant rout for the god of that nation. When Rome brought prisoners back in a triumphal march, the god, or the symbol of that god, of the nation recently conquered, led the parade. The new god was added to the nation's collection with the confidence that her god-power was thus strengthened. When Israel, therefore, was defeated, Jehovah's honor was lessened and it was concluded that his power was limited and overturned. The very name of Jehovah was thus at stake, in the history of Israel's rise or fall. So for “my name's sake” meant that he must be true to the name Israel's faith gave him. The shepherd would give his life for the sheep, using his power up to that limit.

Love so rarifies the atmosphere that we can see the face of a loved one who may be thousands of miles away. We may so love Jesus, the Christ, that using the same repro-

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ducing power we may with our imagination see his face. Bible pictures then throb with life as do letters from home folk.

*The Father created and furnished us to hear and to understand his directions.* The birds by instinct are led to the Southland, though they have never seen it, when the chilling fall comes. He made the birds and us. Paul well urges us to "be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." "My God shall supply all your need," follows in the same chapter (Phil. 4).

*But we have new and better names for God than did Israel.* To us God is "Our Father," Elder Brother, Friend, Saviour, Guide. He must be true to those names, and so will lead us in line with the promise of their meaning. We are not slaves, but sons. He will reach his highest expression and joy in showing his glory through his sons. It will be as natural for his life to thus express itself in beauty and strength when we are righteous as it is for physical nature to show

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itself in blossom and fruit when nature's laws are fulfilled.

We will not be able to secure full help unless we wear the name. This is necessary so that other needy ones can trace the help exhibited in ripe disciples. The tree of life was to be in the "midst of the street" (Rev. 22. 2). Folks must learn from our calmness and graciousness that the grass and the water do refresh and sustain. Knowing from our profession that we are the "sheep of His pasture," people will be eager to find the same shepherd and follow him.

He is able to make "all grace abound toward you, so that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." We may be ever so evil, but he is always graciously near, ready to help when we forsake sin. He will not lead us too far away from the fold so that it will be impossible to return to its felt security when night falls and strength is exhausted. He will be as tender as a mother. He will be as quick to help as a father who watches a developing son. We may not get all the help a son

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might desire, for that would make us weaklings instead of good soldiers.

*Even Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* The clouds had hung heavy curtains over the sun. He seemed to be all alone. We will not always walk on the mountain tops. It will be hard to realize that we are being led amid the trying places found on some pathways. But often the hardest things bring us most growth and profit. Rutherford once said that he would "follow the shepherd through hell, putting faith to the forefront." If he does lead us in the fires of hell, we can be sure that he will also lead us through.

*It is impossible to do good or be good, without his leadership; we will miss the way.* "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." We are bewildered by a thousand different intertwining interests. He alone can give each one of us personal wisdom for our particular test time. We are not good or in right paths if we do not hear and interpret his voice any more than a soldier is effi-



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cient if he does not understand signals and commands. An artist knows pictures of worth. A sculptor quickly identifies a notable marble production. A musician appreciates artistic musical renditions. So good people hear and follow the voice of the Good Shepherd.

John R. Mott once said that he would rather have a student oppose religion than take a merely placid attitude toward it, for when the student opposes he shows that he counts the Christian religion as worthy of consideration.

*The man who buried the one talent was cast into outer darkness.* He had lost the ability to estimate values and was the same as blind. He had not used his sense of estimating spiritual things, and it was lost forever, and hence he was really in outer darkness as far as this power was concerned.

The child growing up in rich atmosphere of home love gets a subtle but certain leadership from the parents. The turn of the eye, the lift of the finger, the twitch of the face, the twist of the head, gives the signal of wish

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and will. A child thrills and thrives in this spiritualized atmosphere of the home. He knows without word of mouth what will please the parents; their very love is leaderful to the obedient and affectionate child. Our Shepherd who leads, by love, enables us at every tempting hour to know his will. We must at all hazards retain the relationship of child and parent toward our heavenly Father. It is often too sadly true that we lose our identity as God's folk and become moneybags, machines or automatons. On an old tombstone was cut this inscription, "John Becker, born a man, died a grocer." Men often become "goats" in wandering self-sufficiency and so no longer hear the "voice" as His sheep.

Perowne says concerning the clause "leadeth in the paths of righteousness": "This can hardly mean only 'straight paths,' as opposed to crooked; i. e., as Ezra explains it, 'He will not make me go over hills and valleys, but on smooth, level ground.' There is rather a blending of the natural image with its spiritual counterpart."

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We will meet some problems that require a steellike moral muscle. It is not always easy to be square and honest. It calls out our valor. He who quibbles and excuses and dodges and squirms is not manly. Whedon says, "We must be humble and trustful though stiff in determination. Right paths are opposed to intricate and unsafe ways and to ways of disobedience and perversity."

*We cannot be perfect except in our purpose.* "Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect," refers to the context which exalts his fairness in sending the rain on the evil and the good. It is better to have the flaws of Peter than the exact formal righteousness of the Pharisees.

Recognized weakness will lead us to a fountain of cleansing. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Our eyes are then kept clear from blurs. We are not twisted in our judgment by evil habits. We are not dominated by

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selfishness or sensualism. The spiritual has the right of way, and it can transform. As Dr. Selby says, "Christ made out of a Caliban a Saint Patrick and out of an Amazonian cannibal he brought a Saint Theresa." He has transformed drunkards into glorious preachers. He has lifted vile folks out of pits of despair into the pathway of holiness.

*We are never free from the twisting temptations of side paths.* In Paul's day, and again in Wesley's day, and even in our day, there appeared a heretical teaching. It taught that man was so saved that he could not sin. Professed disciples lived in adultery and were drunken at the communion table in Paul's time and excused it by saying that their soul was unpolluted since the body alone had sinned and they were thus not responsible. The body is always the servant of the soul which may always be absolutely in command.

Sin saps strength and eats out vitality. It unfits one to meet temptation. John R. Mott describes the effects of a cyclone the scene of which he visited: "Some trees were

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torn out by the roots, others were bent over. A few, however, were snapped straight off because the fiber had been eaten by disease and could not stand against the storm. How like sin in unfitting men for life's storms!" In my boyhood my father was accustomed to lay aside good, straight hickory sticks to be used when dry for ax and hammer handles. Frequently when he took the wood down to work over into handles he discovered that because the bark had not been removed, tiny worms had installed themselves and honeycombed the wood with tunnels.

*Henry Drummond well said, "It is better to be active than orthodox."* If only correct in belief, we may get stale or become a back number, but a healthy soul keeps up-to-date. A conviction is only worthwhile and alive when it drives to action. We are to go some place and not aimlessly wander. We must not rush beyond the leader, the Shepherd; He will keep sufficiently far ahead.

We must at times be patient plodders. It has been difficult through the years for prohibitionists to bear with those who did not be-

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lieve as they did. It has been slow work to get folk to vote right. Jesus, knowing man's make-up, refused to give his decision concerning some moral questions because the people were not able to stand the changes but must face the problem of working out their own salvation. Slavery was allowed to continue, wine-drinking was practiced in the church, but all the time leaven was working through the lump that would expel these things. In the life-time of most of us we will see national prohibition. We must be gentle with those who do not follow Christ, even when we pray earnestly for them without apparent results. His word will not return unto him void.

*We may be led in a roundabout way* when we see a direct pathway that would make the toil less strenuous. Delitzsch says: "The poet glories that Jahweh leads him carefully and without risk or wandering in straight paths leading to the right goal." The steep way might exhaust us too utterly. We dare not be spent with hill-climbing when we meet the wild beasts. "He knoweth our

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frame"; He understands what we can stand. It is not the distance we travel but the effect upon our soul that counts. At other times the way may be steep, difficult and trying. But that too will develop strength needed in the contest with other enemies. Seton-Thompson tells in one of his books the story of a wild sheep, which lazily knelt to nibble grass. In this way he so stiffened his knee that he was not as nimble as the others who worked harder to get their food. When hunters found the flock this sheep as a result could not dodge from side to side as did the others, and the bullet caught him.

We will not be disappointed if we follow the Shepherd. "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." If we "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," we will find ourselves appropriating and enjoying all other needed things.

*Sin is abnormal.* Righteousness is as natural to us as color to a rose, as laughter to the babe, as sweetness to the orange, as golden glow to the sunset.

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Believers do everyday tasks in a natural way. People will not count them odd, fanatical, or peculiar; the sinner wears that distinction. They thought Jesus was a carpenter. Even after he had risen, Mary called him the gardener. He fitted so normally into the beautiful life of service and so thoroughly harmonized with his surroundings.

We may be permitted to suffer betimes in order that we may be driven back into right ways. The child is allowed to burn his fingers, so that he will stay away from fire. Affliction is never sent as a punishment, but through it we may be admonished and others warned. We may walk all roads confidently. If we must go to Calvary, the Shepherd will go there with us and crucifixion cannot rob us of Mount Pisgah. We will find his way leading along ordinary roads. We must do many humdrum things, but amid all these daily doings we will find the Shepherd.

*There is no easy way for certain trades or professions.* When a student in college it



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seemed to me that if I could only get into the actual ministry I would get away from many evil allurements. But that was a mistake. Temptations are as severe, if not more severe to the minister, than to other professions. God is no respecter of persons. Even Jesus met the tempter and Luther in referring to temptations and denying that they were sins said, "You cannot keep birds from flying over your head, but you may stop them from building nests in your hair."

Adam Clarke translates "paths of righteousness" "in the circuits or orbits of righteousness." (It is not a single walled-up pathway. The believer is not "narrow" but broad-gauged. Each must choose his own way, and that alone was meant in the "narrow" way. He may work in any legitimate field with God's call and approval upon him. He is as honorable as a carpenter as he would be as a preacher. He may walk the "right" way as certainly on the farm as if a rich city store owner. There are many "paths" of usefulness open. It must only be a "straight" or "upright" one. There are

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many sheep paths leading to the fold, but they all end at the same place. How foolish it is for a Methodist or Baptist, or Roman Catholic to declare that he alone knows the guideposts to heaven!

We forget our own troubles by fellowshiping with others in the "way." Weston, the record walker, who covered thousands of miles on foot, never walked any place alone, but would always pick up a companion. So we in the pathways of righteousness may pick up some one whom we can help, or who will help us.

*Professor Cheyne says: " 'Right tracks,' as opposed to delusive tracks which lead nowhere."* Sheep stray easily; so do people. The "bad ways" do not always diverge abruptly. They parallel for a time, then gradually divide. People are surprised to discover that they have lost interest in the church and in religion. They do not remember exactly where it began. The drinker and the swearer would not at the start have believed that such habits would one day rule. Even the prodigal did not at

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first recognize his degradation. All kinds of excuses offer themselves for walking the bypaths; beware of the delusive ones that lead away from good and God.

A celebrated opera singer recently bemoaned the fact that so many young girls who go on the stage take what they call the "easy way." In the end she affirmed it is the "hard way." The wages of sin is death.

The Syrian Guest tells us that oftentimes the shepherd may make a mistake and strike a pathway that leads to a precipice over which the sheep will rush or fall. Or he may pick a pathway which will lead into a maze of ways so that they cannot find the way back. We must follow the Great Shepherd, then none of these will occur.

Lincoln insisted on taking the right way and was defeated for senator. Douglas compromised and succeeded then, but was lost later in the maze of politics and missed usefulness. Going to Boston as a green boy from the far West, who had never been in a great city, I started out one day on a sight-seeing tour. Suddenly I found that I had

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landed two or three miles from my point of destination. The streets separated so easily and gradually that I was led away before knowing it and missed my way.

*Wrong is never excusable.* The Spartan parents taught their children to show skill and agility by stealing. If caught, they were severely punished, and if not they were commended. Evil invariably lands us in bad roads that lead away from the Shepherd.

Paul said, "I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense" (Acts 24. 16). He here used the figure of the athlete. He develops his sense of right and wrong just as the athlete develops muscle by directed activity. We enter Christ's school and there develop our moral nature, even as a musician enters a conservatory in order to develop his musical talent.

We must guard our sensitiveness against the enameling of prejudice or the opiate of habit. A farmer owned a dog which he caned every time it barked at anyone until he broke him of the habit. The dog then ceased to be of value; burglars came and

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carried away stock, and the dog, trained to keep silent, did not bark. So our conscience may be whipped and denied a hearing until it too ceases to speak warnings.

*If we live a normally good life, we go straight ahead each day until stopped by the inner voice or by some hindrance.* But when a blurring problem arises which presents more than one solution we need to hesitate and meditate. We think it through with our best judgment, get all possible advice, review our past experience, and exhaust all natural help. Adding to all this a period of prayer, we will arrive at a conclusion, act accordingly, and rest in the assurance that the Shepherd is leading in the path we take.

Keeping our fellowship with the Shepherd vital, we may be sure he will lead us to the end. When Dr. Nansen took his arctic journey, he carried with him homing pigeons. After many months his wife one evening heard a tapping on her window pane. She opened the window and there discovered a pigeon with a piece of waxed paper wrapped around its leg. This slight

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bird, weighing but one and a half pounds, had traveled one thousand miles across the arctic ice, and then one thousand miles more across the barren waste to carry the message. He who thus guides the pigeon will not fail to bring us home at the last.

“I go to prove my soul!  
I see my way as birds their trackless way.  
I shall arrive! What time, what circuit first,  
I ask not: but unless God sends his hail  
Or blinding fireballs, sleet or stifling snow,  
In some time, his good time, I shall arrive:  
He guides me and the bird. In his good time!”

# FROM THE SHEPHERD PSALM

## CHAPTER VI

### COMFORT FOR SHADOWS AND SORROWS

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” .

THERE are glens in Palestine so deep that the sun reaches them for a brief period only at midday. They are usually deeply shadowed. One must know the pathway well to walk through them. It is possible that such tunnels as have been found in Damascus may also have been in the author's mind. One has been found which is dark and damp, and leads for some distance under the hills until it finally opens into the beautiful garden surrounding a wonderful Oriental palace.

*All periods of life have shadows.* Childhood is sometimes spoiled and even the future poisoned by stories told little folks to

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frighten them for sport, or even to secure obedience. I can well remember and shrink yet at the recollection of the recitals of Indian massacres retailed as occurring daily near my home town by marauding bands on the way to my home town and soon to arrive. My father kept a hotel, and boarders enjoyed seeing me shiver with fear as they told me the blood-curdling Indian stories. It is a shame to allow little ones to be thus frightened.

Childhood dreams are often fiercely real and bring intense suffering. All of us have awakened to find chairs inhabited by various kinds of fearful beings—"bogies." They disappeared when we heard the sweet voice of mother or father come through the darkness with reassurance. How foolish those early fears now appear! The darkness has no "spooks" in it. The blue-coated policeman so avoided really loves children. No sort of a "big" man would dare cut off our ears.

We often forgot that our parents would shield us in child days to the limit of giving



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their lives. "Our Father" gave his Son to prove his love and insure care over us. Our daily fears will be seen to be as poorly grounded as they were in childhood when we "know as we are known." If the Shepherd can banish fears in the darkest hours, then we need fear nowhere else. If we find such a shielder, we will be glad to tell others of it.

Fear will face us. Trouble will test and anxiety will bring anguish. Tears will trace our cheeks. Sharp pangs will pain our hearts. Darkness will distill despair. Beasts will beset us on every side. Robbers will steal our riches and ruin our reposeful meditations. Jagged, jutting rocks will bruise our bodies. We must expect all this and more. We cannot repose in the "green grass" always. We will have the "still waters" when needed. There will be strength for the "paths of righteousness." The Shepherd has promised it.

When darkness falls eyes are of little avail. When the valley is entered the dangerous steps cannot be measured nor the hidden enemies all be guarded against. Our

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own natural resources are of little avail. We must go slowly and uncertainly, not knowing what a moment may bring forth. The nerves are taut. The heart beats rapidly. The eyes burn from straining into the unlighted future. The limbs tremble from feeling their way along uncertain pathways. Then, indeed, do we need relief and composure. It too comes from the Shepherd.

MacLaren says: "Life has another aspect than these two—rest and toil; ("grass, waters, paths") and the guidance in danger and sorrow is as tender as its other forms are." We will be companioned and cared for in life's saddening experiences even down to its darkest, the grave. My daytime experiences with the Shepherd insure calmness when the sun is dimmed or the night is on.

Jesus tasted terrifying loneliness and agonizing pain in a real "valley of shadows," the garden of Gethsemane. He walked through it bravely, though his flesh shrank, and passed through the tomb to glory. He understands and has the power to lead us through.

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Bunyan placed the "Valley" early in life's experience. Adam Clarke gives a good paraphrase: "Though I as one of the flock should walk through the most dismal valley, in the dead of the night, exposed to pitfalls, precipices, devouring beasts, etc., I should fear no evil under the guidance and protection of such a Shepherd."

J. M. Mason says of the phrase, that it "does not signify *dying*; for it is not the valley of *death*, but of the *shadow* of death, and the shadow of an object cannot be the same thing with the object itself." Plummer quotes Ainsworth as saying that this phrase is the same as "*immanent danger*, Jer. 2. 6; *sore affliction*, Psa. 44. 19; Psa. 107. 10, 14; *fear and terror*, Job 24. 17; and *dreadful darkness*, Job 10. 21-22." Scott is quoted by Plummer as saying, "Between that part of the flock which is on earth, and that which is gone to heaven, death lies like a deep valley, that must be passed in going from the one to the other."

Delitzsch renders it, "Even when he passes through a valley dark and gloomy

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as the shadow of death, where surprises and calamities of every kind threaten him, he fears no misfortune." Cheyne says: "Hades gloom (literally 'shadow of death' i. e., of Hades) may mean either 'gloom like that of Hades,' or 'the very gloom of Hades.'" Perowne says: "Shadow of death, or simply Dark shadow." Briggs translates it: "Yea, when I walk in a gloomy ravine."

The "Syrian Guest" speaks of two known valleys called "The Valley of Robbers" and "The ravine of the ravens." MacLaren renders it "'Gloomy darkness,' such for instance, as in the shaft of a mine (Job 28. 3)." The experience does not depict merely the death hours, but it gives promise for all dark and mysterious experiences fraught with danger, fright or sorrow.

Youth's days are sunny. Vision plans have not yet been spoiled by failures. Discouraging doubts do not darken the horizon. Spontaneous, bubbling youth quickly brushes aside obstacles. The child plays out of doors while the mother lies a corpse in the parlor. The boy eats the last crust of bread

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with greedy glee. Other children envy the one taken with a dangerous disease.

A little girl in Minneapolis saved her father, a discouraged business man, from suicide. She remarked on seeing the ruined business house covered with icicles after the fire, "O papa, I saw your store to-day, and it was so beautiful with the ice all over it." Her optimism cleared his mind and hope revived, and, with fresh courage for the fight, he won out instead of taking his life, as he had planned.

But simpletons who remain children because of mental food or soft living laugh away danger lightly when they should learn lessons and walk cautiously. We are not to have the shallow confidence of the thoughtless, but the loyal solidity of the soldier of righteousness.

*Death would often be more welcome than to be compelled to walk through some of life's experiences.* The sane man who suicides can have no place in heaven; a coward cannot live there; he lacks the necessary character. We must have the courage to

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grapple with any problem that presents itself and get character results out of it. So we must be willing to go through our "valley"; we will not stop in it. The mother takes back her wayward daughter, even though disgrace is freshened, rather than disown her. The father waits at the prison door for his son, and at any cost endeavors to make a new man of him. Some dishonoring sin may send us to hide in the lonely hills; then we must walk back through the valley that leads to the straight path.

Old age brings many depressing hours that call for the shepherd. Loneliness chills to the very core of the heart. Phillips Brooks was an old bachelor and bemoaned the fact. In later years, when friends visited him he constantly urged that they remain longer, saying that he could not bear to be alone.

*Some one remarks that "shadows" cannot hurt us. Another adds that where there is a shadow the substance must be near. Whatever we conclude, it is nevertheless true that shadows break the spirit, blind the eyes, and*

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burden the heart. Hopes become leaden, thoughts sluggish, and activity mechanical. Many men are driven to drink in an effort to lift depression. Jesus was offered drugged wine on the cross after crying out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It was an opiate, and he refused the potion. Others tempted in the same way have accepted it. The Good Shepherd will give a better inspiriter.

It is more difficult to endure the shadow of an unseen and intangible danger of small proportions than it is to face squarely a much greater one. The nerve strain under the realization that any moment a beast may fly at us or an enemy assault us is indescribable. The quiet preceding a storm often causes a horse to run away which would ploddingly endure the full break upon its head. Worry wears out many more people than do actual misfortunes. Whatever threatens, the Shepherd leads the way and guards securely.

*There are many varieties of valleys.* It may be the lonely wearing one of ill health. How many go down into this ravine and lose

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heart even to desperation. A weak body, a chronic ailment, an unfinished task combine to burden us. Jonah grieved over the collapse of his preconceived prejudices and plans and sat in complaining gloom until physical discomfort awakened him to the presence of many blessings. Elijah, counting over-much on the exhibitions and necessity of material power, sat under the juniper tree in the glumness of the blues when it failed to reappear until the voice divine spoke and led him through the valley of enriching experiences.

Slights are heaped upon us that cut pride and wound us deeply with their utter unfairness. False accusations are uttered by our supposed friends. Folks once loyal neglect us when storms turn some of our ships of promise into wrecks. One may be disgraced as the son of evil-acting and unworthy parents. Dishonor may be brought upon us by the criminal deeds of a near relative. Dear ones drain our strength by drawing out our sympathy through their continual sufferings and great losses. Doctors' bills as well as



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physical weakness wreck carefully laid plans. Some men are then tempted to blame God and cease following. Or they take their case away from him and put it into the care of some new and foolish "ism." Or they grow morose and sour and darken with doubting complaint every place they go. These also are "valleys."

We become impatient over the slow growth of aided individuals, and the small harvest from earnest efforts devoted along the line of service. Our own ugliness is so slowly eradicated; distorting outbreaks are too frequent. Erroneous arguments lead us to wrong conclusions. We allow the statement that "the end justifies the means" to command us. In our overeagerness to succeed it becomes easy to betray or forget a friend. All of these things are but beasts in the valley which would spring upon us unless we are alert and well guarded.

*How staggering is the heart stab caused by some disgraces! As a student I supplied a charge for a few weeks where a beautiful woman of the community came to me with a*

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broken heart. She had lived there helpfully many years and had grown into rare and sane holiness. Suddenly her treasured niece was reported ruined and ran away from the community. In agony she cried out, "Why should this disgrace come upon me?" A young man came to me with undoubted evidence of the unfaithfulness of his sweet and beautiful wife. Can anyone imagine anything more terrible? At such unexplainable times we must trustfully "follow."

A well-known ex-governor, who came near being the United States senator from his State, for years aided the liquor interests. One terrible night he was discovered drunk in an evil resort; the disgrace was breaking his heart. A humble Methodist circuit rider wrote him a letter which said: "In this your time of disgrace the Good Shepherd can lead you out of the valley." The minister closed an earnest appeal to give his life to Christ by begging pardon for writing to the ex-governor about his religious life. The reply came: "You are the first minister who ever thus appealed to me on the subject

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of personal religion, though I have known scores of them. Come and talk to me about it at once." The humble pastor thus led the ex-governor to Christ, and he immediately joined forces with the Anti-Saloon League to drive the saloon out of the State where once he had aided it. And so he came out of the valley. The agony of his published sin brought him to his knees. It may be some other exhibition of our frailty that brings us to obedience.

*When death strikes at us with its fierce terror it is like finger nails tearing our eyes.* It seizes, ruthlessly, the very nerves of our heart. Night seems to settle forever when father, mother, sister, brother, child, or friend closes his eyes in death. You wonder how the birds could sing at such a time. A smile on a face seems like a sign of insanity. Death would be welcome, since then you might follow the loved one. Your child's last cry drew you away from the Shepherd into rebellious side paths, where you found only a bloodthirsty jaguar ready to spring at the throat and strangle forever faith in

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the Father. Who is able to describe the valley where the hearts aching with sorrow walk? Let nature's tears fall; they may mellow the soul for a fruitage that will help other weeping ones.

Can there be a sufficient strength for these hours? Col. Booth-Tucker was speaking at a memorial service for his wife who had been killed in a railroad accident and left him with three small children. He said: "Some time ago in this city I pleaded with a man to give his heart to Christ. He answered back: 'Do you think I could love a God like the one pictured to me? Could you love God if he had taken your wife away from you and left you with three small children!'" Then Col. Booth-Tucker raised himself with a new light in his eye and said: "If that man is in the audience, let me tell him that I love the God who took away my wife and left me with three little ones, and he is dearer to me than ever before."

An old Scotchman lay dying. Physical pain had for a moment dimmed his faith in Christ. His old pastor said to him: "Do you

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not remember, Sandy, when you led the sheep through the valleys, that ofttimes they were shadowed, but that you kept strong and cheery, knowing that there was light a little farther on and that the very light caused the shadows? So, Sandy, these shadows in your faith are caused by the light which is farther on and which will break on you shortly." Sandy saw it and was cheered and rested as he went into the shadow of death.

*"Fear no evil" is the next assurance.* Evil is abundant and everywhere strong; its existence is not denied. We must be on our guard. It will depress us, disease us, deceive us, delay us, disgrace us if it does not bring us to eternal death. We can be fearless of it only when the Shepherd is with us.

Oliver Huckel says, "When all is prosperous, we talk about God; when death draws nigh, we talk to Him." Men pray in dire need who ridicule it at other times. The raging storm on ocean ship brings all to their knees. The low heart beat of some dear sick one calls out a pleading petition coupled

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with promises of amendment, which, alas! too often are broken.

Sufficient grass was provided by the shepherd so that in its strength sheep could go through the valley and on to other pasture fields; if the sheep fainted then his wisdom was short. But Our Shepherd's foresight has already provided in this Psalm for every need of the valley.

A little lad had great difficulty in learning the Shepherd Psalm. He finally succeeded by giving each finger a word. A sudden sickness fell upon him and soon he slipped over into the other pasture lands. His thumb would follow the fingers as he recited the psalm. When he had gone they found the thumb pressed upon the fourth finger—"my" Shepherd. It explained the smile as he fell asleep.

*We grow as we endure.* Some years ago a company of women who were studying the Bible came upon the passage, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of gold." They visited an expert smelter of gold and were told that not only must gold go through the

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hottest fire, but that it was pure only when it perfectly reflected the refiner's image. Our patient endurance under trial may purify us until it will reflect his image.

Stephen stood true under the flying rocks that crushed out his life. Through the broken body came the light of his "faith" which burned a remorse into the intelligent persecutor Saul, that brought temporary blindness. Paul was then permitted for a period to be utterly forsaken in Damascus, where he was feared by the believers and spurned by his former helpers. But this darkness only made the coming light of faith more brilliant. When he had proved his sincerity and tested his own faith in Christ, in due time Ananias, a helper, came with the human contact and message, "Brother Paul," that opened his eyes.

*Joseph was sold into slavery, and tested sorely in Potiphar's household. But he was thus purified, proved his loyalty, and tried out his own faith. Thus he established his fitness to be the prime minister of Egypt and so ultimately saved his people, Israel.*

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Abraham was not checked until he had raised the hand to strike his son, the hope of his life, dead. He there, however, revealed a faith which could be the foundation for the greatest and only enduring nation in the world.

*Under the experiences of the "valley" we will learn that the Shepherd is a personal one. "HE maketh me to lie down" was the first phrase. "THOU art with me" is the more intimate form now framed. So when we come to him in this closer way we will fear no evil. I well remember a young married woman uncomforted when her devotedly loved husband died. She had once been a devout Christian, but had become a Christian Scientist. They told her that "her husband had 'passed on.'" This was indefinite. There was no future time of meeting, there was no exact thing, except that he had "passed on." In the terror of her agony she cried out, "There is no consolation in this." It was only hard and bitter to her taste. She longed for a personal shepherd.*

*The near sheep often get the blow that is*



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*needed to warn the whole flock.* Jesus suffered for our sake. We are to fill up his sufferings; that is, to warn others by suffering uncomplainingly and redemptively. The early preachers endured hunger and cold to bring warnings against sin to careless pioneer settlements, and so saved them. The missionaries die in the effort to stop the degradation caused by heathenism and sow the seed of the Kingdom; their sacrifices are unanswerable to the scoffing world. Ministers have been shot down because of opposition to the saloon and so showed the murder in the heart of the "beast." But no one ever suffered for the right without redeeming some one. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." Love that has supplied all the needs up until the "valley," will not forsake us in it. We need only take a step at a time. The enemy cannot shut up the way of escape.

Some years ago, when a pastor in Denver, after much effort while calling, the author succeeded in getting into a little back room,

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where lived an aged woman, seriously ill. She tried at once to appear well, but finally admitted that her illness was a grievous one. I concluded that she needed an operation and suggested it. She said, "No. I have been running away from it." Finally, after praying together, she said, "Perhaps God has sent you." I agreed to get the best surgeon in the West, a consistent Christian man. She went to a hospital, and I prayed with her just before the operation. She went into the valley of an unknown outcome conscious that the Shepherd was near to succor. The surgeon took away a forty-pound tumor even though she was past sixty years of age. He insisted that the success of the operation was almost a miracle. Later she said that it was only because she was conscious of the Shepherd's presence, who removed all fear, that she came safely through the ordeal. Years after she was still living in a healthy and happy old age. Later a group of great surgeons met in New York and the chief subject of discussion was "A New Method for Avoiding Mental Shock." Operations were

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often unsuccessful, they concluded, because of the shock to the nervous system which fear induced, and it was held that if that could be removed, success would come more frequently. The Shepherd can remove that fear.

*Elijah's servant ceased trembling before the imposing enemy-army when he saw the defending angels.* Jesus was calm in the presence of his accusers because he knew that they could not hurt him then. The martyrs smiled as they entered the flames which ate up their bodies, realizing that the fire could not touch their souls. The Germans could not frighten with their fiendish methods, for the Allies were led by ideals which could not be reached by carnal weapons; death to such soldiers was a mere incident. Jesus said, "Fear not them which kill the body, but . . . fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." The composure of faith renders us invulnerable. We are walking *through*, not camping *in*, the "valley," or even walking regularly in it. We go from one green pasture to another;

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the "valley" is a temporary experience. Even death is but a shadow to the believer.

David had a keen sense of God's nearness and hence had no fear in the presence of the giant. This feeling of confidence enabled him to remain cool in the combat and to detect the vulnerable point in his antagonist. Israel failed to count upon the power in the pillar of fire by night and in the "cloud" by day. Shall we fail to reckon as an asset the presence of the Good Shepherd? Wesley lay dying. His associates eagerly listened for the last word, and it came as the secret of his fearless and splendidly helpful life. It was, "The best of all is, God is with us," and so he fell asleep.

*"Thy rod and thy staff."* Fear cannot be scolded out of people. It is foolish to punish children for being afraid. We must demonstrate the harmlessness of the dark room. Faith crowds out fear as light does darkness. Remember who leads and the sweetness of safety gives the heart comfort. When we are obedient we may confidently say, "Thou art with me." What fear can I then have?

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All of us have whistled to keep up our courage through a deep woods or along the edge of a cemetery. Amid all life's terrors we need only sing, "Thou art with me" until the stillness of peace possesses us. He will come to us on the waves.

The staff was Christ's insignia of office as the Son of God. He could be victoriously calm in the very presence of death. If he could conquer the grave, then he can conquer every impediment that leads up to the resurrection. He who bears this staff is our Shepherd and our Saviour. Friends can go with us to the verge of death, but he alone can go through it. That is the promise of the "Staff."

*The rod was the emblem of authority.* Love gives orders. Obedience is necessary. The rod was used to number the sheep as they passed under it. It was also employed to administer needed correction that would bring a lesson. John D. Freeman in the book *Life on the Uplands* tells us that he once heard of a Scottish shepherd who deliberately broke the leg of a tameless lamb, one

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which he could not control. Then he carefully set the leg and carried the lamb in his arms. When the lamb was completely healed, he followed gladly and trustingly. In his suffering he had found out the heart of love of the shepherd and so was eager to obey. Our rod may lead us to see the heart of the Good Shepherd.

We may walk well poised and aggressive in a forward leading path-way even though it be dark. There is no upsetting, no purposeless running, no staggering, no hesitancy; we go straight onward. In God's good time we shall arrive.

We are ready to rally at the distress cry of the rest of the flock. The "Syrian Guest" tells us that often when a wolf attacks the sheep the individuals will get excited and scatter in blind terror so that many are killed. When the shepherd encounters such an attack he will immediately find an elevated spot and call out a familiar sound that will lead them to rush quickly to a common spot around him. This will either crush the wolf, or drive him from the flock with fear and

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defeat. So we, finding a poor fellow attacked anew by drink, will not forsake him, but will rally to his help until the devils again fly. When a woman slips into the old pathway of sin we do not say "I told you so," but, rather, respond to the call of the Shepherd, who will be found by her side, to help and deliver.

*We will never dare to be harder on others than we expect our Lord to be upon us.* In Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush, Lachlan Campbell, in his stiff notion of justice, moved that his daughter's name, "Flora," be stricken from the church records when she went astray. Margaret Howe, whose son, the "lad of pairts," had died, visited him to find that he had crossed "Flora's" name off the Bible record, and said to him: "Wae's me if our Father had blotted out oor names frae the Book o' Life when we left his hoose. But he sent his ain Son to seek us, an' a weary road he cam, a' tell ye. A man wadna leave a sheep to perish as ye hae cast off yir ain bairn. Yir worse than Simon the Phari-see, for Mary was nae kin tae him." The

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truth struck home, and he sent for and welcomed the straying girl in a heart-warmed home, and so finally acted like an under-shepherd.

The rod and staff were reminders of the shepherd. All reminders of Jesus and his work are the same as the rod and staff were to the folk familiar with shepherds. It may be the Bible, the communion service, the testimony meeting. It may be a letter from mother, an old gospel song, a Scripture text, a thrilling memory of sweet youth, or a dozen different things. All are but remembrances of the Good Shepherd.

*We can go through anything if he is with us.* A poor woman about to undergo an operation in a hospital felt sure she would die, and the chances were really against her recovery. Finally, however, she said, "I can endure it if Lady Augusta Stanley can sit and hold my hand." The latter did so, and the woman recovered.

One day during the Civil War a man was passing through a soldiers' hospital ward, when a boy reached up his emaciated hand



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and in a weak voice said, "Will you not come and write a letter to my mother?" Though hurried much, the great man stopped and wrote the letter. When it was finished the lad said, "Won't you sit by me and hold my hand until it is over? It will only be a minute, or two." And then the big-hearted President, for it was Abraham Lincoln, sat down again and held the lad's hand while he walked on through the valley, and when death had received him, the President folded the cold hands and left him. And so he was the "staff" for the lad.

The poet Heine went into the hospital an atheist, but six months of suffering there led him to find the hand and the heart of the Good Shepherd. Talmage tells us that when bees were sent to the Barbados and found it a year-round summer land they ceased storing honey and spent their time stinging the natives.

Be of good cheer—he will not leave you comfortless. You cannot mistake your way. Suppose it is dark—he is near. You will soon come out into the open again. Dangers

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may be thick, but he will see that no injury befalls you. Fear not. Love and lean hard. He will not fail. In every valley and night his comfort will sustain and satisfy the heart.

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## CHAPTER VII

### SECURITY FROM SIN'S ASSAULTS

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence  
of mine enemies”

OLIVER HUCKEL insists that the Protector here is no longer the shepherd, but a host with human beings at his table. It is, some assert, the prefigurement of Christ sitting as host at the passover table, which became the Lord's supper, while his enemies plot to destroy him. J. R. Miller quotes George Adam Smith as saying concerning the preceding verses: “If these show us the shepherd with his sheep, upon the pastures, those follow him, shepherd still, to where in his tent he dispenses the desert's hospitality to some poor fugitive from blood. The shepherd's tent in the wilderness was a little sanctuary, where the hunted man was sure of shelter, where ‘every wanderer,’ whatever his char-

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acter or past might be, was received as the guest of God—such is the beautiful name which they still give him—furnished with food and kept inviolable, his host becoming responsible for his safety.”

Elijah P. Brown seems to agree with Briggs and Huckel, for he says: “No sheep can look into the face of the Shepherd in the valley of the shadow of death and remain a sheep. The look kills the sheep and gives life to the warrior. No sheep can see the face of the Shepherd in the valley of the shadow of death and continue to live as a sheep.” Plummer quotes Stevenson as being confident that the “table” figure is borrowed by David from the feast he enjoyed in Saul’s house after slaying Goliath, which honoring attention excited “the envy and hatred of many.”

“The Syrian Guest” insists that the description can be literally applied to sheep, and insists that the shepherd must spend much time and skill in finding “a good and safe feeding place for his sheep.” The author adds: “Then there are snake holes in

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some kinds of ground, and if they be not driven away the snakes bite the noses of the sheep. The shepherd sometimes burns the fat of hogs along the ground to do this. Sometimes the shepherd finds ground where moles have worked their holes just under the surface. Snakes lie in these holes with their heads sticking up ready to bite the grazing sheep. The shepherds know how to drive them away as they go ahead of the sheep." "And around the feeding ground which the shepherd thus prepares in holes and caves in the hillsides there are jackals, wolves, hyenas, and panthers too, and the bravery and skill of the shepherd are at the highest point in closing up these dens with stones, or slaying the wild beasts with his long-bladed knife. Of nothing do you hear shepherds boasting more proudly than of their achievements in this part of their care of flocks."

*The beast or the sheep nature is expelled as we recognize kinship with God under such sifting as comes in the "valley."* F. B. Meyer says: "It is, of course, very helpful to think of oneself as a sheep, and of

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Christ as a Shepherd; but there can be no fellowship between the dumb animals and their watchful keeper. The psalmist, therefore, seems to say: 'I am more than Jehovah's sheep; I am Jehovah's guest.' "

We will be attacked often, but all that hurts or destroys will be unable to reach us. Jesus was persecuted by enemies and was constantly watched and bitterly hounded. He was sorely tried in the wilderness, but after the testing time angels came and ministered to him. He as the Good Shepherd is acquainted with our peculiar enemies and will prepare the "table" before we faint or are overcome.

Enemies are always ready to sow the tares of sin amid the good seed in any heart. Growing chaff closely resembles wheat; we must beware lest we mistake its presence as a sign of fruitfulness. All of the dangers are not in the "valley." Even when we reach the plains or are exalted on the hilltop, enemies are ready to pounce upon us. They grind their teeth in a hungry mouth in anticipation of feeding upon our souls. We

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are never secure enough to be unwatchful. But the Shepherd makes full provision. "Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." He will guard as well as guide us.

*Protection and food are promised "in the presence of mine enemies."* Opponents of the good are abundant. The enemy may appear as an angel of light, or he may take the form of a wolf in sheep's clothing. He always goes about as a lion greedily seeking whom he may devour. "An enemy sowed tares among the wheat," said Jesus. Satan's serpents camouflage in order that they may poison the souls of men. We are told that the Germans scattered helmets and all kinds of souvenirs over "No Man's Land," having attached to them electric wires that fired bombs destroying any who picked up these articles. These are the snakes in the grass. The Good Shepherd, however, always detects those who would harm the soul and gives due warning.

We will be certain to have enemies if we walk with him. They may be as reputable

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as the Pharisees. They may be members of the church and at times they may even be sincere in their opposition to us. It is never easy to be a Christian. It is still less easy to be a leader for the upbuilding of the Kingdom, but it is worth while. His strength is sufficient and times of repose will follow our hard journeys through the valley.

We will never be secure from attack. After the witness of the Spirit, when Jesus was baptized, came the virulent wilderness temptations. Right always has skulking wolves and sneaking panthers on its track; its heel may be bitten at any moment by some demon-possessed snake.

Satan hates and hounds one who is true to God. Woe be unto you when all men speak well of you. He who has no temptations may be assured that he is of little account in the battle against Satan; the arch fiend like as not already holds a mortgage. Trials come thick and fast at times, but we will never be tempted "above what we are able to bear." Adam Clarke says, "A magnificent banquet is provided by a most lib-



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eral and benevolent Host, who has not only bounty to feed me, but power to protect me.”

*When we are low-spirited in weariness the enemy looms large.* He generally appears when we are depleted physically and so less able to stand against him. The blues, fumes from below choke and blind us when many problems have harassed us. Satan came to Jesus while he was weak from fasting. We need to ponder in thoughtful meditation the face of the Host until the conviction is confirmed that no enemy dare assault us. The Host is mightier than any enemies. We revive joy and renew faith as we realize this security in the very presence of the enemy. Fear dissolves and we recline at the table until refreshed and ready to continue the journey. Or, if there is a contest, we are fearless and strong, having eaten the life-giving bread at the Lord's table.

The denizens of darkness can live only on destroyed characters. They can secure food for their degenerate souls solely in the nighttime, as owls can forage only in the darkness. The lustful steal about in the

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shadowed regions or robed as friends to tear down souls. They are supremely happy when slipping up with silent tread and pouncing upon unsuspecting victims. Saloon-keepers are objecting because motion pictures always locate crime in drinking places. But the truth is nevertheless thus shown. It is safer to stay away from crime-reputed spots if we would avoid many assaults from the enemy. We must avoid the swamps infected with moral malaria if we retain our sturdiness.

God has more power than all that could be against us; one with God is indeed a majority. Tenderness when turned into protecting anger is fierce and burning. The female protects her young against enemies many times stronger and with frequent success because tenderness defends its loved objects with smashing abandon. So our God who is conquering love is also a consuming fire. Love does not underwrite universalism, but rewards merit with justice.

Dr. Jowett tells of a sermon by Horatius Bonar on this text, which was given to all the

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blind at Edinburgh. We need not know and see all. "He who keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps." We may be unwarned concerning our dangers, but we can be fearless nevertheless since the Good Shepherd prepares the table and is on guard.

*We must walk carefully.* Side-stepping or wrong paths may put us within reach of the serpent's bite. Compromising practices may poison our souls. An Arab relates the experience of a cousin who lost three hundred sheep from poison absorbed from eating a weed that thrived amid the grass. Girls go adrift from multiplied frivolity and carelessness. Boys are taunted to drink or swear as a proof that they are "game." Betting is oftentimes played up as an exhibit of courage. Evil forces endeavor to discount the danger and the poison power of sin. It urges, "Eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die." It tries to build up the assumption that the Christian life robs one of all humanity and normal joys.

Again it whispers: "All drink" or "All carouse." "There is no need for you to be

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different from others." We must not accept such specious arguments; there are many still left who do not bow the knee to Baal. Morality must be guarded more sacredly than health. An ancient fable tells of a magic coat which when rubbed brought selfish wishes to pass for the owner. But also every time a wish was realized the coat grew smaller and ultimately choked the owner to death. Our composure and placidity publish the fact that the Shepherd does banquet us.

Our irritability, flurry of spirit, and fault-finding may rile and ruin the happiness of the church or the group with which we mingle. I well remember a dinner party which was marred by one man who was fretful and complaintful about an experience through which he was passing. He depressed the whole company, broke the harmony of fellowship and spoiled the very flavor of the food. We ought, rather, to increase the world's happiness.

John Howard Payne was born into a lonely New York life, was a wanderer over

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the face of the earth, homeless and often hungry. It was the happy song of a peasant woman working in the field that gave him the inspiration for his immortal "Home, Sweet Home."

*Enemies assail us at all stages of our earthly life.* Youth, middle life, old age, each will find a well-directed assault. There is no sheltered spot along life's pathway, no day when we need not watch and pray. If, however, we walk with Him, there will be protection for every day down to the grave. But without our Leader old folk are peculiarly pitiable; they are tortured by the buzzards of remorse, the crows of gloom, the howling wolves of retribution. Without our Risen Lord only a starless night of inky black awaits the aged.

*There are no "prepared" tables for the unbeliever.* Without Christ no security is insured. Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman tells of a splendid young bank officer who refused his personal plea to become a Christian. Dr. Chapman had just buried the wife, who left the father with two little children. The

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banker boastfully declared: "I am a moral man. I have no bad habits. I have a strong will. Why do I need Christ, or an open profession of religion?" A few years afterward Dr. Chapman received a telegram calling him to the town where the banker lived, to conduct his funeral. In a moment of severe temptation he began stealing money, and had kept it up, and finally committed suicide in utter despair before the disgrace of discovery.

*Social life often brings unexpected enemies.* When the sticks which Paul had brought to kindle a friendly fire on the island of Malta began to burn, the snake amid them, warmed by the atmosphere, pounced upon him. Sailors and soldiers, lonely and homesick, sometimes wander into certain social groups in the hunger for fellowship and find themselves suddenly open to sins that would never occur if they were not thus led on. We must help defeat poisonous social life by providing a happy religious social life. Jesus fellowshipped with the unpopular. He called Matthew, the ostracized tax

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collector, to be one of his disciples. He ate with the Pharisees even when they were opposed to him. We may warm hearts by human fellowship and sociality until faith thrives. We are warned by Paul to "be not forgetful to entertain strangers."

*Homes, then, should be made happy.* The wife serves God well who makes her household so cozy that it is more attractive than any other place to the husband and children. There are higher thrones for womanhood to sit upon than merely to hold public office. One mother suddenly found her boy out every night and her husband making regular business engagements. She awoke and spent time planning "home" evenings until both son and husband were won back and a happy home was insured that was better service than her club offered.

We should close up the dens along the social highways that correspond to the jackals, wolves and hyena holes which threaten sheep while they are pasturing. A noted temperance lecturer tells of a struggle he once had. Coming home from a lecture, the

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passion for drink fell full upon him. He rushed out in the night, but saloon after saloon, to which he wildly resorted, he found closed. If the saloon, the jackal hole, had been open, he would have been pounced upon by the enemy and destroyed. Where prohibition comes, prisons empty out, merchandise stores thrive, banks bulge with savings, and happy homes are erected.

*“Thou preparest a table” may be taken literally if we so desire.* Food both affects us and shows our ideals. Men and women first learn to drink in fashionable restaurants and in some cultured private homes. One may show that he is a glutton by his action at the table. Eating may be recognized to be an individual’s highest purpose. Folks betray their ideals of companions or make companions who pull down the soul at feasts. We come closer to each other while breaking bread together. We open our life to the influences of those at the table where we eat. How necessary it is, therefore, that our heavenly Father prepare even our human table for us and that we follow his standards there.



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The word literally translated "table" here may have been that which was sometimes used by the Jews. It was only twelve inches high, and was round. The word is employed one hundred and eight times in the Old Testament and twenty times in the New Testament. Or it may have been a mat or a skin or a cloth spread on the ground. Hastings's Bible Dictionary says that the inner meaning of the word is "spread out." It suggests a homey table or, at least, a congenial group. We do not think of the tiny samples in the side dishes of the hotel. It, rather, vivifies the help-yourself dish of the family table.

Naturally, we appreciate such a table after the loneliness and losses of the "valley." It is as a couch to the weary, as a drink to the famishing, as the meal to the hungry toiler. As it is very homey, the church should be a homey institution or else she cannot "prepare a table." We should pray not stiffly, but as in conversation with the Father in his house. One of the highest privileges of a guest is to get acquainted with a

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distinguished host. We may know Him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering. If we will meditate upon his work and love, all fear will leave as snow disappears before warm sunshine. He has not given us "the spirit of fear, but of love, and of power, and of a strong mind."

*He will sweeten the home circle.* Here is a good motto to put on the dining room wall:

"Christ is the Head of this house,  
The unseen Guest at every meal,  
The Silent Listener to every conversation."

He is there and gives fragrance to fellowship and spiritual potency to all the means used to build us up. He sat at the table with the disciples at Emmaus. He found rest at the home of Lazarus while waiting for and walking toward the cross. He gave his last intimate farewell around the table in a quiet upper room where were gathered his friends where he inaugurated the Lord's Supper.

The phrases here used suggest the intimacy which only love makes possible.

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“Thou” preparest a table. It is “before me.” Both of these terms are very personal. Do you remember the last time you were in your mother’s house and you sat down to her table? There was a certain dish which no one could prepare as she did. She did not forget that you relished it. The meal was prepared for you. It was prepared to show that love had memory, and also to make you comfortable and happy.

The men in the trenches are gladdened by letters and little gifts that recall faces and hearts that yearn for them as they fight. These messages and trinkets are prepared for them. In the case of the latter it is not so much the gift but the love that is back of it. Our Father tells his love for us in the things he prepares. A feast is not sweet because large and elaborate, but because it has the flavor of love in it. That will insure heart balm.

We refuse to have servants at the home table, not because we look down upon them, but because the table is peculiarly dedicated to the family and strangers spoil its atmos-

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phere. So there are some "tables" like the communion service where only disciples gather. The Salvation Army has a meeting every Monday into which none are admitted but soldiers and officers of the organization. No more intimate figure of familyhood could be used than "Thou preparest a table."

*The spread table prepares us also for our daily tasks.*

When the college football team goes into training they are assigned to certain training tables that build them for a particular task. Our task is to serve. His food will furnish us to do it efficiently. When God furnishes the supplies there is an abundance. The widow's meal did not run out when she was feeding the prophet. The lad's lunch was increased until all the multitude had enough and to spare. When the children of Israel were starving in the wilderness God gave them manna and quails from heaven.

The "table" suggests a place for friendly intercourse. We may take time for holy communings with the Host. We may have the relaxation of faith while at the Lord's

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table. We may see God's loving care in regular furnishment of food and clothing. Anxiety need not break our peace, the table will be prepared.

The toiler plods his weary way to the home of love at nightfall. Here he finds the wife tastefully dressed, the kiddies clean and eager to greet him. Chair, slippers, foods, warmth, light—everything are prepared both to rest him and to express love throughout that household. Danger and worry are shut out. Security, love, fellowship make the conditions ideal. Days and weeks and even years of common experiences together, of tears and laughter, of sighs and smiles, have brought the members of the home circle close together. So the "still waters," the "green pastures," the "paths of righteousness," and "the dark valleys" have made us well acquainted with members of "the household of faith," and we sit down for close and comforting fellowship.

*The heavenly Host prepares both the rest and the food that we need, with special spread tokens of love at the end of severe*

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days so that the love there breathed out may build our soul. He redeems and forgives, until we feel at home at his table. We are never shut out because imperfect. Even the Pharisees were invited. He ate with scolding Martha. The jealous Pharisees charged that He fellowshipped with publicans and sinners. All may feel at home and enjoy his feast.

As MacLaren says, "The table spread in the sight of the enemy is a more signal token of care and power than the green pastures are." Guards must be placed against the onslaught of the enemy. Nehemiah had to arm the Jerusalem rebuilders with both trowel and weapon. No labor is spared by the Host. The enemies have no power to affright. The desert sojourn need not discourage; love will find a way.

Will the guest be unmoved by such loving thoughtfulness? Will he go out and prove to be a traitor? Even Judas was invited with the other disciples to such a prepared feast while the enemies stood round anxious to tear the Shepherd to pieces. He felt the

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warm touch of the Master's fingers as they washed his feet and took the "sop" from the Host's hand, and yet he dared to betray the Host. Have we feasted with Christ and then grown cold and disowned him?

*MacLaren says, "This is the condition of God's servant—always conflict, but always a spread table."* The lazy Christian is lean. The hard worker is fat of soul. The food is fitted to furnish a warrior, not a soft neophyte. Henry Ward Beecher made such a study of food properties that he knew what sort to eat to equip him for an anticipated task, whether muscular or mental. We must be spiritually nourished to meet the various enemies.

He will give us insight for real values. Enemies to holiness will look ugly while we are in his presence. Daniel refused to fatten with the meat which was reputed to be alone capable of producing beauty and efficiency, because in accepting it he acknowledged the necessity of idol-worship. The world prescribes banquets and the bizarre cabarets, and cards, wealth and wildness, but our

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Host not only prohibits all artificial stimulants but furnishes something better. We will enjoy the church service, the prayer meeting, the Book of God, and the outgrowing social activities which a Christian will follow. We will not merely eat in the atmosphere of a specific worship service, but we will gather strength from fellowship all the time. "God is everywhere."

An old man came to an English city to see his daughter, and missing her, was lost and spent all of his money. He went into York Minster and sat all day waiting for help. Toward evening someone finally found him and gave him the needed aid. He said, "I thought that if I came to the Lord's house, I would find a prepared table." He was not disappointed.

*It is a pleasure to go to God's feast.* It is not a stiff duty. Huckel says: "It is a table of bounties. There is refreshment for the eyes in all the beauty of nature and life; there is refreshment for the ear in the sweet sounds of nature, the voices of friends, and in the symphonies that man creates in noble



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harmonies; there is refreshment for the mouth in the luscious fruits; there is refreshment for the brain in noble thoughts and high converse; there is refreshment for the body in tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep; there is refreshment for the heart in the love of kindred friends; there is refreshment for the soul in the visions of truth and the gracious opportunities for beautiful service for God." We recall this fellowship later and clear out depression with its good cheer.

If we miss the feast, some one else will take our place. The Host will not be disappointed; his house must be filled and he will allow no provisions to be wasted. He will send out into the highways and hedges and "compel" others to come in.

*The fact that he cares and provides for us in the presence of enemies is a signal evidence of his love.* One past deliverance should banish our doubts when another danger threatens. He does not scold but mellows us with his love; the prodigal understood and came home.

F. B. Meyer tells the story of a traveler

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who wandered about and was lost and all but famished when a terrible storm struck upon him and apparently drove him out of his way and finally threw him exhausted into abundant foliage. Here he found food growing and at the base of a tree a spring. In the very midst of his loss there was a spread feast.

A missionary among the Eskimos tells how that for four Sundays in succession seals came up to the place where they were generally caught. He wondered whether the Christian Eskimos would resist the temptation to take them. Finally they reminded him that they recognized in this Sunday coming of the seals Satan's work. They refused to sin and later were rewarded with an abundance of seals to supply their winter needs.

We need not force our way into the feast. We need only seek it as the privilege of a toiler seeking equipment or protection.

Amos R. Wells tells the following parable in his book of sermons to children: "The king had announced that the royal crown of

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happiness would be given to the right person who applied for it. Master Vanity spent all his time in seeking royal garments and in putting on clothing to make a worthy display. Miss Selfish boasted that she had a 'pull' that would land it. Harry Headstrong demanded it as his right and fitting to his worth. Lucy Loving asked for it so that she might give it to her dear ones and friends. She then forgot about it until one day some one called her Queen Lucy and she felt her forehead and found a crown." Our Host or Shepherd adorns us and feasts us so that we may be a blessing.

# COMFORT AND STRENGTH

## CHAPTER VIII

### SOCIAL HAPPINESS AND SPIRITUAL CONTENTMENT

“Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup  
runneth over”

THE preceding verses of the Psalm have been describing the guests sitting at a banquet table. Whether we carry the figure of the sheep or change to that of persons, if we are not at the Host's table, we have chosen rather to eat the husks of the world. The “Syrian Guest” holds that this clause still applies to the sheep. He describes a nightly process. The Shepherd “rods” the sheep. He has pine tar and a horn of olive oil. Each sheep is examined. A bruised head or a scratched side is anointed with oil, or tar. When one is found to be utterly exhausted, he stops it and washes its head and face with refreshing olive oil, and then dips a two-

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handed cup into water prepared for the purpose until it runs over, and gives the weary sheep a drink.

Another writer tells of the visit of an English woman to an Arabian ship at Trincomalee. She sat down to rest and immediately a woman servant of the ship does obeisance and pours ointment upon her head to help refresh her, and honor her as the guest of the Arab ship.

*Caste does not rule in America, but "society" circles hold sway in certain sections.* The poorly dressed do not find a hearty welcome in "millionaire" groups where money is king. The boarders at a celebrated wealthy resort-hotel in the East threatened to leave because the recreation-seeking school teachers, paying their way by acting as table waiters, attended the hotel chapel worship services, with the guests. How differently Jesus treated folk! Only the man who carelessly or stubbornly refused to put on the provided wedding garment was shut out. The "byway" and "hedges" folks were otherwise admitted without exception. There is

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food and to spare for all who accept, and a glad and honoring welcome.

The Master knows that disciples require the nourishment of the table, but they also need the refreshing cheer of friendly association. He will not allow the table to be half full. Jesus told the disciples to go out and "compel" guests to come in, that "my house may be filled."

The Shepherd's care insures healthy hearts, and that means unbreakable happiness. He who is joyless does not eat at the Master's table. "These things have I spoken that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full," was Christ's declaration. The Psalmist prayed, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation." Jesus promised the woman at the well of Samaria a spring of satisfying water that would bubble up constantly. "Your joy no man taketh from you."

*We need love "feasts," or they would not be furnished.* Jesus broke bread with close friends before he went to the garden and the cross. We require such human sympathy

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and encouragement. The Master took the intimate disciples, Peter, James, and John, into the mount of transfiguration and then with him into Gethsemane. Paul regularly had a traveling companion on his long preaching tours and was heartened many times by friends. The seventy were sent out two by two. Jesus was recognized at Emmaus as he broke bread as of old at the friendly board. Wesley received his abiding impetus from the college club jeeringly called "Methodists," but regularly named "The Holy Club." Moody's name always suggests his vital associate Sankey. "Billy" Sunday's courage and spirit is sustained by the sunniness and poise of Mr. Rodeheaver. Church membership insures us Christian fellowship. We need close companions who also walk the Christian way. So we sit at the banquet board with other disciples of the Host.

The psalm has been logically progressive. It has encouraged and insured a social atmosphere. Common experience together in the "green grass" and beside the "still

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waters," and more certainly as we come "through the dark valley," leads us to a happy fellowship which reaches fullest expression at the "table prepared."

There must be a *social* atmosphere before the *spiritual* can bring blessings. A cold church never has a revival. The anointment of the Spirit comes only where there is love and friendship, and hence there is the table, and then the "oil" and the "cup." This easily prepares the way for the home with God. Earthly relationships are to teach us what heaven is like. It is not to be a strange and unnatural place. We are to have foretastes of it here.

*"Thou anointest my head with oil" is the glad testimony of a pilgrim in the way.* Cheyne says: "Every rich man had in his household an anointer, who had to place a cone of ointment on the head of his master, where it remained during the feast. Ointment to the Jews was a symbol of joy." Briggs says, "It was the custom in the Orient to honor guests by anointing the head with oil or scented grease before entering



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the banquet room, as in Amos 6. 6; also Luke 7. 46. It was also the custom to sprinkle the guests with perfume."

Plummer says: "When men were sad, they covered themselves with dust and ashes. When joyous, they washed and anointed themselves. Men never anointed themselves in token of grief. The anointing of guests was also to show them honor and to declare their welcome." He quotes Hengstenberg as saying, "The oil, which is the symbolical expression of joy, is one of the necessary accompaniments of a festive and joyful entertainment." Huckel says: "It is God's royal welcome to us; it is the glad salutation that goes with the word of greeting and the kiss of peace. It is an Oriental token of love."

It seems strange that the great God should do so much to woo us to himself. The psalmist well cried out, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" But God is a God of love and desires our affection as any other father does the love of his children.

*The oil stands always, when used as oint-*

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*ment, for affectionate association.* When Israel sinned and was rejected, the olive trees ceased to bear, and hence olive oil could not be manufactured. When they returned to God, the olive harvest again began as a sign of the reconciliation. When Israel signed a compact of friendship with Judah, with whom they had broken, they anointed the captives before returning them home. The act of anointing stands as a seal of our salvation. It prefigures the Holy Spirit, whose anointing leads us as members of God's family to cry, "Abba, Father." We are to be at home in his household.

The leper was anointed after his healing as a symbol of reconsecration. The appearance of the disease identified as a penalty for sin had shut him out. When cured he was fit again to be a fellow citizen with the saints. The welcome ointment awaits the repentant backslider.

A common saying among the Jews was "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart." The fresh, bubbling spirit of youth gladdens all hearts. The vital Christian never grows

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old. His spirit keeps us sweet and spirited. The anointing was never used in times of mourning. When Bathsheba's child died, David arose and anointed himself because mourning had failed to restore the child to health. It was always the sign that mourning had been put off.

The custom of anointing began at least as early as B. C. 4200. The Jews put oil upon every exposed part of the body to heal sunburn. It thus brought ease and increased the attractiveness of their appearance. Spiritualizers have drawn suggestive lessons. The oil smoothes the skin and makes it even to touch. It brightens and refreshes the personality and so increases the beauty. It augments the fragrance of the atmosphere, and so multiplies happiness. The ointment in this way aided beauty, harmony, and the emotional life. Jesus always does that.

*We are to worship him in the beauty of holiness.* If we walk with him, our whole being works symmetrically and we accomplish the most possible in life. He thrills our hearts with tokens of his love and care.

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Marion Harland tells us that a gifted authoress had a strong book ready to publish at the close of the Civil War. She found that it would wound and tear many hearts and hence deliberately burned it. She would put no bitterness in the world's cup.

*The anointing marks the host's guests as respected and honored.* He calls us no longer servants, but he has called us "friends." He really desires us to be in his presence. Plummer paraphrases the meaning: "Thou treatest me like a well-accepted guest at the table which thou hast prepared for me." It is God's message to us that we are welcome in his company. Simon the Pharisee neglected to give Jesus, his Guest, this token because he had him there merely to catch him and not to comfort and sweeten his soul. What Simon neglected, Mary Magdalene's love noticed, and did at great sacrifice.

The scented ointment was usually employed only by the rich. Spurgeon quotes an old, unnamed comment as follows: "Thou hast not confined thy bounty merely to the

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necessaries of life, but thou hast also supplied me with its luxuries." John the Baptist, who fasted and dressed in camel's hair, was, said Jesus, "the least in the kingdom of heaven." He saw intrinsic value in fasting—an earning of merit—but Jesus taught that nothing was useful or binding unless the soul was developed by it.

The beautiful and glorious things of earth belong to saints; we must only beware and learn how to use them and not abuse them. "The world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours," says Paul.

Judas objected because the ointment poured out on the feet of Jesus was an extravagant expenditure. It did seem like a costly waste, but Christ commended it. The hard round of duties is always with us. We need the notable and memorable tokens of love, lest we lose heart. Jesus sees to it that we get such help. Human love is akin to God and "Everyone that loveth is born of God." "If a man . . . loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love

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God whom he hath not seen?" We must love to make helpfulness effective.

*We are in a great rush these days and we may miss the Host; but if we are alert, we will recognize him even more quickly than did the Emmaus pilgrims. Sir Launcelot searching for the Holy Grail missed it because he did not notice the beggar at the gate. Marie Corelli pictures the world's thoughtlessness when in the Master Christian she depicts the Christ as the neglected lad. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." We may even in entertaining strangers find that we have angels as our guests.*

All sit as equals at the Master's table. He anoints all guests who accept his invitation. There are no privileged groups or clannish classes. Will we substitute anything for his invitations? Will we show our cheap notion of it by neglecting it, or will we gladly push everything aside that we may sit with him, our Lord Christ, as host?

✓ *The ointment was used also in earliest*

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*times by religious workers for healing.* That was its practical medicinal effect, but later it was employed with the expectation that God would add a miraculous efficiency to it. Hence the elders of the early church were told to pray for the sick and anoint them with oil. The sympathy and prayers of friends did aid faith and often brought new health. A little later a group thought that the dead should thus be anointed to help them in their journey to heaven. This group were ultimately accounted heretics. However, the habit grew until the Roman Catholic Church adopted it. It is now called "extreme unction" and is counted one of the seven sacraments of that church.

*When ointment was thus used it asserted the abolition of hate.* The Methodist communion form inviting people to the sacrament suggests that fact. "Wherefore ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, . . . draw near with faith." An ex-cannibal arose angrily and hurriedly left the communion rail in a mission church

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in the Sandwich Islands. He stopped at the door, hesitated and finally returned. He gave the cause: "Kneeling at my side," he said, "I saw the man who had killed my father and ate his heart while it yet quivered with life. I had vowed to kill him. I arose, so determined. I remembered Christ's prayer, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' I uttered it and returned to kneel by my father's forgiven murderer as my brother."

If one is offish with others, and he sits down at the table with Jesus, he will soon find a point of harmonious agreement. Factional strife shuts out spiritual sunlight. Bickerings and brotherliness cannot dwell in the same institution. Bosses may thrive in politics, but they can never sustain a winning church. We must sit as equals around the Master's table.

It will never be beneath us to do the most menial tasks. Jesus washed the disciples' feet. "But whosoever will be great among you, let him be as the minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let



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him be your servant" (Luke 22. 26). On a recent battlefield a messenger bearing an important dispatch was suddenly blinded by a bursting shell. He groped along the ground until he felt another comrade and urged, "Quick! take this dispatch and deliver it." But the other answered, "Both my legs are broken." The dispatch bearer said, "Can you see?" On receiving an affirmative reply he picked up the comrade and said: "You furnish the eyes and I will supply the legs and so deliver the message."

The ointment stands for the grace of God, and speaks of his patience and forgiveness. It will heal sorrows, redeem disappointment, soothe rough ways and sweeten bitter cups. *His* grace heals heart hurts, as does no other remedy.

*The anointing was also used in setting apart people for certain tasks.* Priests and kings were thus dedicated. Jesus said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." We who believe are set apart to be his representatives and messengers. "We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

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Accept the assignment as an honoring appointment.

The saloon marks its patrons with repugnant breath, scarred soul, and destroyed faith. The gambler exhibits his master's rule with gaudy dress, heartless eye, and loaferish life. The silly, shoddy girl shows the life to which she is dedicated by frivolous talk, careless acts, and cheap ideals. Dives demonstrated that he was a stranger to Jesus by leaving Lazarus to lie in pain and hunger at his gate. But with Paul we too may "bear in our body the marks of the Lord Jesus." The world may recognize that we have been with Jesus and learned of him. The fragrance of his personality may pervade ours and thus gladden the world. We may indeed be living epistles "known and read of all men."

All ages and classes were invited by our Lord's love. He had a welcome for youth as manifested in the love and leading offered to the rich young man; seeing his possibilities, he yearned for the life. His arms sheltered the babe; his presence gladdened Anna,

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the aged prophetess. He spoke peace and gladness to the sinner, Mary Magdalene. He wiped tears from the eyes of the widow of Nain. He sends us out inviting any who "will" to become his guest. The wedding garment is provided; it only need be gladly worn.

Cardinal Woolsey near his death, in agony cried: "Had I but served my God with half the zeal I served my king, he would not in mine age have left me naked to mine enemies."

There is no fellowship more stimulating and sweet than that known by theological students in their own dormitory. All give up worldly advantages to take up the work of the ministry and must see value in sacrifice that no "thirty pieces of silver" can depreciate. A college girl who had married a theological student wanted to help him get through school. She had no knowledge of cooking, but she was brave enough to announce that she would take boarders. A dozen theological students agreed to eat at her table. They had a common aim, ce-

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mented by deprivations, and were in a daily association as they studied together to meet a high goal; thus their hearts were knit closely. The food was such as only an ignorant and inexperienced cook could prepare. It was sometimes indigestible, but the cup of congenial fellowship was so full in the atmosphere made by such jovial, high-idealed, splendid friendship that the digestive organs of the group were enabled to perform some extraordinary feats in their particular branch of service.

*“My cup runneth over”* is another jubilant testimony. Briggs says this is “the cup given to me by my host, the wine cup of welcome.” Cheyne says, “A large portion being a proof of hospitality (Gen. 43. 34).” Elijah P. Brown says, “This is miles and miles beyond the green pastures and still waters with which he started, and now he has got to where his blessings come in cloudbursts.”

It spells contentment. Paul said: “I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.” “All things work together for

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good to them that love God." We are assured that no harm can befall us. Even beds of pain have given out rare blessings to the world. His grace can bring peace under any kind of circumstances.

If we reckon up our blessings of past days, we must conclude that our cup is indeed overflowing. The post office is swamped before Christmas with letters to Santa Claus carrying requests. But only one child remembers to write a "thank you" note. Ingratitude begins early. It always blinds to the beauty and richness of the near and present-day things.

John B. Gough, on the way to deliver a lecture, complaining under the gloom of despair brought on by discouragement, stopped to call on a long-time invalid. He went away happy and ready to endure anything. The invalid greeted him with, "O, Mr. Gough, I am so happy."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because the doctor tells me that if I continue to improve, and if the weather stays fine, and if nothing unusual happens, in two

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weeks I may be turned over and lie on my other side." For years she had been compelled to lie helplessly in bed.

*The cup of sustenance and joy overflows; there are no miserly portions.* Complaint is groundless if we are God's guests. He measures out fitting gifts to individuals. If we always received the coveted things we count advantages to others, we might be hindered and crippled by those very things. He knows what I need and fills my cup. One sort of food gives one person indigestion and exactly agrees with another who may even be more frail. Physicians rarely ever treat two patients exactly alike.

If we think about and so get the full taste of our cup as we drink it, we will recognize its value and get its joy; otherwise we will gulp it down almost uselessly. To drink with an envious eye on another is to embitter it. To swallow it down ungratefully is to miss its flavor and richness.

Look at your cup of joy. It contains tried and cheering friends. It has fed heart love and home life. It holds remunerative,

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interesting work. It is filled with health and hopefulness. It is flavored by fellowship with Christ and Christians. What more can it contain?

A cultured woman who for nine years had gone out doing washing so that she could support an invalid husband and three children said: "I am so glad I married for love. If it had been for money, that might have been lost. If for beauty, sickness might have stolen that; but my love has made it a joy to toil for dear ones and the days have been glad ones."

Other fountains cannot fill your cup. They may provide temporary substitutes, but these do not satisfy. Wealth, power, education, friends, influence only partially quench our thirst. The Master's cup may at times have bitter draughts in it; but it takes bitter quinine to kill malaria. Moral drugs may save us from degeneration. We may be driven to confess a fault, to rectify a wrong, to correct an exaggeration. Frost spoils a turnip, but sweetens a parsnip.

"Our light affliction, which is but for a

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moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." When he directs, tears or smiles at the last bring us an overflowing cup of glory.

Folks have been known to leave a meal when they were hungry, because aggravated for the moment. When anger has cooled off they have come back to their place at the table. Sometimes folk act in the same way over some slight or actual mistreatment in leaving the table of the Lord. There will be no comfort or joy until you give up your backsliding and come back humbly to sit with him in heavenly places. If there is no joy in your religious life, then you are not sitting at the table where our Lord is host.

*We may be proud of receiving the cup from his hand.* There is an aristocracy among his guests, but it is the aristocracy of character. Neither need we be perfect in our goodness. Mary Magdalene was given a cup overflowing, and she had nothing to show but her repentance. This, however, was enough to insure her growth in goodness, and her future beauty in character.



## FROM THE SHEPHERD PSALM

We cannot be fully worthy; neither is it necessary. The prodigal son returned and thus gave occasion for the fatted calf to be killed. His penitence secured his welcome.

Material things cannot give us the spiritual blessings for which we long. A boyhood friend of old Commodore Vanderbilt visited him in his days of wealth, and openly begrudged him his possessions. The old Commodore took the man with him one day to see the round of duties that faced him. When night came on he turned to the friend from the country and said: "Now, John, would you trade places with me for a place to sleep, something to eat, and clothes to wear? That is all I get out of it."

*Without Christ as the host, life is only a material grind or a monotonous routine, but with him there is a bubbling, brimming cup of joy and refreshment all the days down to old age. Then comes the plaudit, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." That anticipation keeps the cup overflowing when the powers are worn down by the years.*

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Captain Wilson, quoted by Dr. Briggs, tells the following experience that he himself had as a guest in an Oriental home: "I once had this ceremony performed on myself in the house of a great and rich Indian, in the presence of a large company. The gentleman of the house poured upon my head, my hands, and arms a delightful odoriferous perfume; he then put a golden cup into my hands and poured wine into it until it ran over; assuring me at the same time that it was a great pleasure to him to receive me, and that I should find a rich supply in his house."

Samuel Burden, quoted by Spurgeon, says that in the East the guests are anointed with fragrant perfume to express "love and respect," while a cup or glass is filled with choice wine until it runs over "to imply that while they remained there, they should have an abundance of everything."

MacLaren insists that God's guests have no "scanty meal," but a "banquet accompanied with signs of festivity, viz.: the head anointed with oil and the cup which is

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fullness." Delitzsch says, "His enemies must look quietly on, without being able to do anything, and see how Jehovah provides bountifully for his guest, anoints him with sweet perfumes as at a joyous and magnificent banquet, and fills his cup to excess."

Dr. Briggs calls this "a cup of welcome from my host." He adds that the word can be translated "exhilarating." All who take it will get a blessing; they will be thrilled by its contents.

*It includes "daily bread."* Delitzsch says, concerning the promise in the cup, "What is meant thereby is not necessarily only blessings of a spiritual kind, it also includes an abundance of daily bread streaming in upon them." We forget that God's hand is in that. Mark Guy Pearse tells us that in the month of August we are within six weeks of starvation. If suddenly the heavens should be closed or the sun cease to shine, all the food in the world would be eaten in six weeks.

An old lady was earnestly praying for food when the larder was bare. Mischievous

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lads heard her, slipped away, got two loaves and dropped them through the chimney. When they arrived she immediately dropped on her knees and thanked God for sending the bread. The boys to work out the joke knocked on the door and told her that God did not send the bread, but that they brought it. Her face was radiant and her spirit calm as she looked at them and said, "God did send the bread, even though the devil brought it."

*But it is an overflowing cup.* God's promise to Abraham was, "I will bless thee, . . . And thou shalt be a blessing" (Gen. 12. 2). The disciples on receiving the Holy Spirit immediately aroused from their lethargy and began preaching. Paul's vision was translated into world missionary journeys. "Give, and it shall be given" is the Master's promise. If we have nothing to give out to others, then we have not been blessed of God. He will multiply the cruse of oil. He will fill the cup to overflowing.

*Riches come from giving, not from getting.* The poorest man is the rich miser. He

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that loses his life saves it. Nothing given out in His name is wasted. "My word shall not return to me void." His blessings must overflow; other kinds are spurious.

His cup of blessings contains daily experiences of protection and provision. Ordinary events spell out his love for us. An old saint near starvation was brought food enough to sustain her life and to bring her back to health. Exultingly she exclaimed as she surveyed the food, "All this and Christ too." With him God freely gives us all things richly to enjoy.

# COMFORT AND STRENGTH

## CHAPTER IX

### FORETASTING A HOMELIKE HEAVEN

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever”

ADMIRAL USHER, in charge of the naval forces at New York, insisted in the midst of war that no men in that service were agnostics or doubters. He said, “Men who live in the constant presence of death cannot but believe in God and the future life.” Few intelligent people now deny immortality. All nations and tribes in the past have had and now have some form of belief in it. Reward and punishment have generally been connected with the future life.

The people holding the clearest views always have advanced the most rapidly. Christianity, with its positive doctrine of “eternal life” and a prepared “place,” has

## FROM THE SHEPHERD PSALM

brought forth the largest men and insured the most rapid advancement. If existence ends the day after to-morrow, at the death hour endurance and experience have little value. Ambition will wither if there is no impetus toward the future. If death ends all, then "let us eat, drink, and be merry." The Roman Stoic who opened a blood vessel when loss or disgrace faced him did a logical and sane thing.

*Christ was the "first fruits." None before him had themselves arisen from the grave.* He thus underwrote his promises. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day," said Paul. We do not sorrow as those who are without hope; we are assured of immortality. Such a hope plants quenchless joy, for the last defeating enemy is conquered.

*A cheerless life never reaches its best.* An optimistic disposition acts on character as sunshine does on flowers. Plants that catch but a few scattered rays must always be puny. His peace flows like a river; it is not

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spasmodic or periodic. A grumpy life hinders digestion and sours the temper. Fault-finding shrivels the heart. Ingratitude leads to treachery—remember Benedict Arnold.

Happy folks are usually fleshy and good-natured. The one who worries or always picks flaws is thin and weak. The big-hearted have plenty of friends. The domineering and snarly drive folks away from them. Everyone may be hopeful in this bright day of God's rule on earth no matter if temporary clouds do arise.

Corporal R. Derby Holmes in the American Monthly magazine tells the story of his regeneration through the medium of war-trench experiences. Running away from home, he enlisted in the navy, but deserted and was saved from court-martial by an earnest plea for another chance. He then deserted again, was imprisoned for a year and a half, and finally went to England to enlist. He first "found himself" after volunteering almost thoughtlessly with a squad assigned to make a raid across No Man's Land. He was there converted, made new



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in ambition, moral habits, and directed energy. In explaining the cause he says: "The one thing that did more for me than anything else was the constant thought of death. Even now that I have come out of the war [for permanent wounds sent him back to America], I find that I haven't lost that thought of death. I came to realize that life is only a passing thing, and that whatever I want to make of it must be made *right now*."

*We sing, "When I can read my title clear."* We need not wait to do that. Already we have "passed from death unto life." "He that hath the Son hath life." "He that believeth on the Son hath life everlasting." Enoch walked with God, and was not, for God took him. A little girl who had heard the story repeated it in her own way as follows: "One day God and Enoch went for a long walk. They were so interested talking together that they did not notice how far they had gone. Suddenly they discovered that Enoch was a long ways from home and very tired. God then asked him to go home and stay with him." When we get the right

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notion of death, then the other life appears but as another room of this same house, the universe, which God owns and furnishes for us.

*The progress of the psalm has been very natural.* At the beginning man was a sheep, who took orders and obeyed somewhat blindly and automatically. That is also the picture given in the story of the garden of Eden. But when man went into the "valley of the shadow of death" he found in his dire need a deeper nature that responded and was congenial to the companion later incarnated in Christ. He then ceased to be a sheep, and became a fellow pilgrim with the angel that changed Jacob, the Supplanter, into Israel, a prince of God. It was easily natural then for him to sit and feast with him in a home-like manner. Such fellowship becomes so normal that the pilgrim anticipated the next life happily because he is to dwell with the God that he found, while walking earth's pathway, as a Shepherd and Friend and whom he also often met face to face while worshiping in his temple. This pilgrim is

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quite willing to have such intimate association, as came to him in worship, stand as the symbol for heaven, for then it will be home-like.

*The psalm goes step by step to the triumphant claim of a victorious future. We are led beside the still waters, deep, quieting and thirst-quenching. After a satisfying meal we lie down in the green grass. The depleted soul is restored and is gladdened by visions of the Shepherd-God. We are directed so that the path of righteousness is clearly marked before our feet. We are accompanied in life's dangerous and heart-straining valleys and rested at a banquet table where we are fitted to meet and defeat our alert enemies. We are given an honoring welcome and our hurts are healed. Such loving and considerate treatment finds a confidence that declares: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Such care, such love, such expenditure can be explained by nothing short of the fact that God is fitting me so that "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

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*The feast spread in the presence of my enemies is finished.* We are again on our feet walking in the "way." It is necessary to keep our eyes open. The enemies are no longer restrained by fear of the Host. They will undertake to lure us into a bypath where they can assault us. They will follow stealthily, endeavoring to catch us off guard, even though we do follow the Shepherd. We are never secure against "falling" until safe at home.

Satan's allies attack us, purposed to capture and destroy our souls. A man once a slave to liquor stood for two happy years on strong sober limbs amid the taunts of former drinking companions. With devilish glee former companions fired the old appetite by giving him a piece of fruit cake saturated with brandy, and he fell.

*"Goodness and mercy" are the twin angels that are to give man everything he needs.* "Surely" is by some taken to be a form translated in other places as "only." Then it would be "only goodness and mercy." The meaning is practically the same. God so rules

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that all the experiences of earth work for us what "goodness and mercy" should work.

It does not mean simply financial, material, or even mental prosperity. We will have our failures, our sorrows, our losses, and our questionings. But it will be sufficient, however, that "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8. 37). When we are in the "valley," the Companion is there; when the enemies threaten, he sits in our midst; when life's pathway ends, we will dwell forever at home.

*Nothing so aids the forces of evil as discouragement.* Men are frightened away from goodness by it. They are assured by Satan ahead of time that they will fail in endeavoring to follow Christ. Countless thousands give up the fight because they have failed once or twice. An oath slips out of the mouth, a dishonest deal leads them temporarily astray, an old habit trips them unexpectedly. And so they surrender. This is not in line with the American spirit. Our soldiers will usually fight as Paul Jones's

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men did. They know no surrender except to death. The same spirit must actuate Christ's fighters. A wound, a fall, a failure need not defeat us. We must not give up. We must "fight a good fight" and keep "the faith." Goodness and mercy follow us and should save us from despair. Paul assures us that we have a Saviour who was "tempted like as we are"; then let us "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

*Goodness promises us all our wants.* Mercy insures us care, whether we are worthy or not. Goodness may convict us of sin and make us a culprit, but *mercy* offers us pardon and reconciliation. Goodness woos us back to the Father, as was the son living in prodigal carelessness when he remembered the home conditions. Mercy greets the son when he returns and refurnishes him for his place in the home. Goodness offers healing. Mercy works it out. What blessed twin words these are! They never go alone.

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*Thankfulness builds faith.* We beg too much in prayer. We need to reckon our treasures that come from above to recognize a love that can be trusted all the time. We need not detail our to-morrow needs. Prayer is not sending a list to heaven's storehouse as we do to the family grocery. It is a quieting of fears by reassurance and an opening of the ears for orders. The Father is not too busy to notice and watch over us. Not a sparrow falls without him. So we recall his "goodness and mercy" and thank him in happy contentment as we are thus assured of all future needs.

The world judges our acts without knowing our disposition. Some deserve more credit for being "good" than others. We do inherit traits that are hard to overcome. We are often defeated alone by inherited tendencies. God knows and follows us with his mercy when we do our best.

*Often we are stung by a remorse which says, "If you had only done it this way or that."* His goodness recognizes that while there have been mistakes, our best was put

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into the decision and action. His mercy will save our mistakes from causing the damage that they would otherwise do.

We seem to have failed utterly, and are tortured and tantalized for days and weeks. His goodness insures us so that out of it shall come best results. His mercy soothes the soul unto restful trust. These twin angels bring us into quiet and peace.

*His goodness and mercy redeem.* God never fails to placard sin. Health authorities have kept down the death rate by placing cards upon homes where diphtheria, scarlet fever, and other contagious diseases exist. The surgeon has often performed operations that have left victims scarred and in a physical way less capable for work, but the treatment was necessary to stop the inroads of disease. If the surgeon was so "soft-hearted" as to be unwilling to inflict suffering when the avoidance of that infliction coming in an operation would have brought death, then should he not forfeit his diploma? Inflicted pain is often a merciful good.



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Whisky burns the inward parts, makes the head dizzy, and staggers the judgment. It thus shows at its first entrance some of the ultimate degeneration which it will work on the character if its use is continued. These placards or danger signals should be heeded. "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." We will recognize that goodness in all of our experiences. We see that he plans best things for us everywhere and always.

*We will not have an easy time.* Christ's soldiers will have enemies to combat even as do those who fight in the trenches. Temptations assail bitterly, but defeat need never be known. He that is with us is more than he with them.

A man addicted to opium complained to the physician treating him that he must have a grain or two or he would go down, as he could not exist without it. The physician answered, "Then go down like a man."

A fellow traveler gave John G. Wooley a headache remedy on the train, which aroused all his old appetite for drink.

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He came into a town and searched in vain for whisky. He then fought all day Sunday with his room locked. He came near falling and had a tremendous struggle, but the mercy of God did not allow him to utterly go over the brink. The battle, however, left him a stronger and nobler man. The trenches developed unsuspected heroes. We must not pray for ease, but only for victorious grace.

Then he will completely pardon. Our past may cause us to keep on guard, but it need not keep us backward. His blood makes us white as snow. The sins are blotted out; they are removed from us as far as the east is from the west. No more will they appear against us. His mercy saves us from a dragging, crippling memory of past sin.

*This goodness and mercy abide all the days.* Not merely as a cradle bed of repose and ease, but as servants to aid in fixing character. When we have appropriated their influence for years, temptations lose their power. Outbreaks of sin become as re-

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pugnant to us as moral lapses would to the sweet-hearted woman.

We do not need to seek a Persian prayer mat, a Roman Catholic confessional box, an Episcopalian prayer book, a Methodist altar, nor a three-by-four clothes closet. Every place is hallowed ground. "They who seek the throne of grace find that throne in every place."

We are growing as steadily and surely as the oak amid storm and sunshine. All men are under the influence of the goodness and mercy of God, but all do not appropriate that influence. The sun and the rain fall on the evil and the good, but only a few are able to turn the material products of the soil into soul sustenance.

*Such goodness and mercy demand a future life.* God would not waste constant oversight on a soul that was to perish at the grave.

"I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Optimism grows out of this conviction and the resulting cheeriness clears up the

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gloom until the other shore looms near and clear.

Plummer says, "To the true Israel the house of God was from early times an emblem of the house not made with hands, so that the last clause of this verse points not only to great blessings arising from communion with God on earth, but to still higher, richer enjoyments of those who worship in the sanctuary above." The psalmist, you will remember, said: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord." Paul tells us that "if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5. 1). The "household of faith" (Gal. 6. 10), literally translated, means "in the home of faith." In the book of Ecclesiastes death is given the figure of "Man goeth to his long home" (Eccl. 12. 5). The term carries to our thought the fact that heaven is not a strange, abnormal place, but that they who walk with God here will feel at home there.

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*Adam Clarke says: "During the rest of my life I shall not be separated from God's house, nor from God's ordinances; and shall at last dwell with him in glory. These last two verses seem to be the language of a priest returned from captivity to live in the temple, and serve God the rest of his life."*

Perowne says: "The house of Jehovah might refer primarily to the tabernacle, as later to the temple; and if so, that to which he looked forward as access to God in his sanctuary, and the blessedness of communion with him there. He was thinking perhaps of this life more than the next."

The Jews had no very clear conception of a future life. The Sadducees in Jesus's day denied another existence after death, while the Pharisees affirmed it. It is hard to get a concrete vision or promise of it in the Old Testament. Immortality was, however, never denied, but seemed, rather, to be taken for granted.

The temple of God contained the "Holy of holies," and into this the high priest went once a year, because it was believed to be the

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place of God's abode. If he was not struck dead, then God was not angry with the people and they returned to their daily pursuits with confident joy. When Daniel prayed he did so with his face toward Jerusalem, because God was supposed to live there. When this author, therefore, expresses the wish to dwell in the house of the Lord, he merely affirms a desire to be near God.

*We sing, "Where Jesus is 'tis heaven."* "In thy presence is fullness of joy. At thy right hand are pleasures for evermore." The promise then is that we shall be with him. If God be there, whatever conditions may exist he will make them heavenlike. Each of us may now be the temple of the Holy Ghost. Repentance will bring cleansing and fitness. Then we need only to open the door of our heart for his entrance and we will immediately begin to have heaven.

As Christ's disciples we will find ourselves congenial to the truths and the services of the house of God. We will discover that people who there worship with us grow into a close and sweetening fellowship. We en-

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joy their company, we converse along similar lines. We have common thoughts and it is a joy to discuss them even as are the common experiences of happy travelers.

Something is wrong with us if we do not feel at home in the house of God. When we are discordant with a chorus the chorus is not to blame, but we need to adjust our voice and spirit. If we do not desire to dwell in the house of God here and now, we cannot expect to meet Christ face to face in the homeland.

There may be cuts and wounds and scars and beatings and stripes, if not imprisonments and shipwrecks—such as Paul endured; but we will not be hurt in our real selves. He will protect us as the “apple of his eye.” We are in his house, we are under his care. If he has conquered the grave, even death cannot hurt us.

*He will be with us here on all kinds of occasions.* “Lo, I am with you always.” In this way he will understand us, and our home “over there” will be a prepared home fitted to our peculiar natures. The promise is that

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he will "prepare a place for you." We can then be steady, well-poised and certain in our purpose.

When the Germans were overrunning Ypres and pushing rapidly on toward Paris, General Haig rode out with fresh troops so calm, so confident, so determined in his plan to fight and win, and so well prepared to do so, that the retreating Allies reformed and went back with him and saved the day from defeat. Our steadiness and assurance may fit us to calm the fears of others.

*This large hope keeps our ambition alert and alive.* We look forward happily as we appropriate the goodness and mercy in an eager desire to be ready for the day when we shall see him face to face. As the bride gathers together all her resources to fit herself to worthily greet the bridegroom, so do we to be ready to receive our coming Lord.

Old people, strange to say, do not find it easy to leave earth, but seem to get the habit of living; this has promise in it. Young people give up more easily and count it more natural to die. It may be that the soul has



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so appropriated life that death does not have the terrors that come in the earlier mysteries of life. We must completely follow the Good Shepherd. We must gladly sit at the table of the Lord as his guests. We must appropriate all the good things of the house of God. Then some glad day we will find ourselves "face to face," and will know even as we are known.

We must separate ourselves utterly from the domination of the material world. F. B. Meyer tells of a rich and pleasure-seeking woman who was converted and joined the Salvation Army. When she accepted the simple uniform and quarters she put her fine clothes and jewelry into a trunk and stored them away where she might pick them up again when she backslid. Naturally, she did not stay in the service long; she had not burned her bridges behind her. In reckoning the warfare against the evil power she did not decide to give herself completely to Christ's cause.

*We are not to wear an orphan-asylum uniform.* We are not to have our personality

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erased. As "one star differs from another star," so shall we be in glory. Each will have his place and task. Then we need envy no one else. It behooves us to earnestly and eagerly fill our own place so that the work there will bring us the best possible cultivation and growth; the end will be—"enter into the joy of the Lord."

Heaven is near earth. "The tabernacle of God is with men." The house of God here may be very similar to the house of God we may see beyond. Thrilling visions have come to us in worship hours. Time is not wasted by church attendance. Strength and stimulus have been implanted, and courage for trying contests has come again and again. God has touched and transformed our lives. We have gone away assured that he was near.

*Fellowship is real and normal in the future life.* Moses and Elias, kindred spirits, both given to discouragement and impatience on earth, were together in heaven. It does not seem abnormal for us to find Jesus on the mount of transfiguration; he appears

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very much at home. Lazarus immediately found his way to Abraham's bosom; that was what he needed and longed to secure.

Then he "that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Otherwise values will be mixed and sight blurred and guides fall into the pit with those they lead.

George Rue, a little adopted lad near Chicago, had a shrunken leg. A beautiful young woman had been badly burned in an automobile accident. The doctor declared that skin must be secured to graft upon the burned places of the young lady's body or else she would die. The lad heard about it and quickly offered his shrunken leg. He insisted and finally they amputated it. The skin there was sufficient to restore the young woman to life again. But the shock was too great for George and he died. But he did so with a smile and a joy crown on his brow, insisting that it was a privilege to expend himself for the healing and happiness of another. He went into the other life as one graduates from school into active life.

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When we go into the house of God through the valley of the shadow of death, we go no more out forever. We do not then sit down in the presence of our enemies, we have no tears to be wiped away, but we are to be forever with the Lord. With Victor Hugo we may sing,

“Let us be like the bird  
New lighted on a twig that swings:  
He feels its sway but sings on unaffrighted,  
Knowing he has his wings.”

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